



Mouth Care During Chemotherapy and Radiation Therapy

How does cancer treatment affect the mouth and throat?

Some types of chemotherapy and radiation therapy can harm your teeth, gums, and the lining of your mouth. Most mouth and throat problems go away after chemotherapy or radiation ends, but during treatment you may have:

- Painful spots or sores in your mouth and on your lips
- Changes in taste and smell
- Sore throat, mouth dryness, or burning in your mouth or throat

How can I care for my mouth and throat during and after treatment?

- Gently brush your teeth at least twice a day with a soft bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. If regular toothpaste is too harsh or causes pain, you can brush with baking soda and water.
- Floss at least once a day unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- Use salt and soda rinses. You can make the rinses by mixing together these ingredients:
 - ¼ teaspoon salt
 - ¼ teaspoon baking soda
 - 8 ounces (oz) of warm water

Take small sips and swish the rinse around in your mouth. Then spit the salt and soda rinse out and rinse your mouth with plain water.

- Sip water throughout the day so that your mouth stays moist (wet).
- Place a humidifier next to your bed when sleeping or napping. This will keep the air that you breathe moist. Change the humidifier water once a day and clean the humidifier as directed.
- If needed, continue fluoride treatments with your dentist.

How do I treat mouth pain and dryness?

There are several ways to treat pain and dryness. Some require a prescription from your healthcare provider, and some you can buy over-the-counter from a store or pharmacy.

Prescription treatment options:

- **Magic mouthwash:** This rinse is a mix of liquid Maalox[®], Benadryl[®], and lidocaine. Use the rinse (swish and then spit) every 6 hours as needed.
 - You can also buy liquid Maalox[®] and liquid Benadryl[®] over-the-counter (without a prescription). Ask your clinic for more instructions on mixing this up at home.

Over-the-counter treatment options:

You can use more than one of these products at the same time.

- **Aloe vera mouthwash:** Follow the directions on the package.
- **CloSYS[®] mouthwash:** This is a non-alcohol-based mouth rinse. Follow the directions on the package.
- **Coconut oil:** Gently swish the oil back and forth through your teeth. Rinse well with water.
- **Prevention[™] Oncology mouth rinse:** Buy the bottle with the orange label that says “formulated for oncology patients.” If you cannot find this item at your local pharmacy, check with your pharmacist to see if they can order it for you. It is available online.
- **Products containing xylitol (a sugar-free sweetener):** This includes products such as Xylimelts[®], ACT[®] Dry Mouth Lozenges, and sugar-free gum.
- **Dry mouth sprays and artificial saliva**
- **Lubricants and mouth rinses** such as Aquoral[®] and Biotene[®] products

What if I continue to have mouth or throat pain?

If you still have mouth or throat pain, you may want to avoid the following items that may irritate (cause discomfort for) the mouth and gums:

- Toothpaste with sodium lauryl sulfate, anti-tartar chemicals, and whiteners
- Foods that are spicy or salty
- Acidic foods, such as citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruits, lemons, or limes)
- Foods that are sharp, hard, or crunchy (such as potato chips)
- Hot foods
- Sugar-based candy or soft drinks
- Alcoholic drinks

Instead, you could try the following:

- Cold foods and drinks (like popsicles or ice chips)
- Soft, bland, or moist foods (like bananas, bread, rice, or noodles)
- Pureed (blended) foods (like mashed potatoes, applesauce, or pudding)

When should I contact my doctor?

Contact your doctor if you have any of these signs or symptoms:

- You notice cuts or sores in your mouth
- Bleeding from your gums
- Your sores or mouth pain is causing you to eat or drink less
- You can't take medications because of mouth sores or pain
- You develop white patches on your tongue or inside your mouth
- You have a fever of 100.5° F or higher

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