

Mouth, Gum, and Throat Problems

Good oral care is important during cancer treatment. Anticancer drugs can cause sores in the mouth and throat, a condition called stomatitis or mucositis. Anticancer drugs also can make these tissues dry and irritated or cause them to bleed. Patients who have not been eating well since beginning chemotherapy are more likely to get mouth sores.

In addition to being painful, mouth sores can become infected by the many germs that live in the mouth. Every step should be taken to prevent infections, because they can be hard to fight during chemotherapy and can lead to serious problems.

They can also make these tissues dry and irritated or cause them to bleed. In addition to being painful, mouth sores can become infected by the many germs that live in the mouth. Because infections can be hard to fight during chemotherapy and can lead to serious problems, it's important to take every possible step to prevent them. Here are some suggestions for keeping your mouth, gums, and throat healthy:

- If possible, see your dentist before you start chemotherapy to have your teeth cleaned and to take care of any problems such as cavities, abscesses, gum disease, or poorly fitting dentures. Ask your dentist to show you the best ways to brush and floss your teeth during chemotherapy. Chemotherapy can make you more likely to get cavities, so your dentist may suggest using a fluoride rinse or gel each day to help prevent tooth decay.
- Radiotherapy can turn your teeth brittle through calcification. Attend to any dental problems before you begin treatment. Also remember to warn your Dentist about earlier RT in advance of future treatment.
- Brush your teeth and gums after every meal. Use a soft toothbrush and a gentle touch; brushing too hard can damage soft mouth tissues. Ask your doctor, nurse, or dentist to suggest a special type of toothbrush and/or toothpaste if your gums are very sensitive.-- Rinse your toothbrush well after each use and store it in a dry place.
- Avoid commercial mouthwashes that contain a large amount of salt or alcohol. Ask you doctor or nurse about a mild mouthwash that you might use.

How can I cope with mouth sores?

If you develop sores in your mouth, be sure to contact your doctor or nurse because you may need medical treatment for the sores. If the sores are painful or keep you from eating, you also can try these ideas:

- Ask your doctor if there is anything you can apply directly to the sores. You also may ask your doctor to prescribe a medicine you can use to ease the pain.
- Eat foods cold or at room temperature. Hot and warm foods can irritate a tender mouth and throat.
- Choose soft, soothing foods, such as ice cream, milkshakes, baby food, soft fruits (bananas and applesauce), mashed potatoes, cooked cereals, soft-boiled or scrambled eggs, cottage cheese, macaroni and cheese, custards, puddings, and

gelatine. You also can puree cooked foods in the blender to make them smoother and easier to eat.

- Avoid irritating, acidic foods, such as tomatoes, citrus fruit, and fruit juice (orange, grapefruit, and lemon); spicy or salty foods; and rough, coarse, or dry foods such as raw vegetables, granola, and toast..

How can I cope with mouth dryness?

- Ask your doctor if you should use an artificial saliva product to moisten your mouth.
- Sip on plenty of liquids.
- Ask your doctor if you can suck on ice chips, popsicles, or sugarless hard candy. You can also chew sugarless gum. A sugar substitute that is in many sugar-free foods, can cause diarrhea in many people. If diarrhea is a problem for you, check the labels of sugar-free foods before you buy them and limit your use of them.
- Moisten dry foods with butter, margarine, gravy, sauces, or broth.
- Dunk crisp, dry foods in mild liquids.
- Eat soft and pureed foods.
- Use lip balm or petroleum jelly if your lips become dry.
- Carry a water bottle with you to sip from often.