



Mouth care during cancer treatment

What you need to know:

- Mouth problems during cancer treatments are common.
- You need to keep your teeth, gums and mouth clean.
- You may notice mouth problems at any time during your cancer treatments.
- Common mouth problems are dry mouth, mouth sores, and taste changes.
- These problems may last for 3 days or longer. They usually get better or go away after you finish your treatment.
- Avoid tobacco products and alcohol. Ask your healthcare team for help with quitting smoking.
- Use non-petroleum based lip care for your lips. Look for lip balms with a base of lanolin, beeswax or vitamin E.

What to do to prevent mouth problems:

- Before you start your treatment, have a check-up with your dentist.
- Keep your teeth, gums and mouth clean and moist at all times.
- Report any mouth problems to your healthcare team.

Here are some other things you can do to help prevent mouth problems:

- Drink 6 to 8 cups of liquids per day, unless you have been told otherwise.
- Avoid things that irritate your mouth like acidic, spicy, or hard and crunchy foods.

Use a homemade mouth rinse to rinse your mouth:

To prepare it, mix one teaspoon of baking soda and one teaspoon of salt into 4 cups (1 L) of water. Make the rinse fresh every day and keep it at room temperature for a maximum of 24 hours.

When to contact your healthcare team:

- If you have difficulty swallowing, a sore throat or severe mouth sores contact your healthcare team.
- If your temperature taken in your mouth (oral temperature) is above 38.3°C (100.9°F) at any time OR above 38.0°C (100.4°F) for at least one hour contact your healthcare team or go to the nearest emergency department.

How to care for your mouth:

Brushing:

- Use a small, soft bristle, rounded-end toothbrush.
- Brush your teeth, tongue and gums after eating and before bed.
- Rinse your toothbrush in hot water to soften the bristles before using it.
- Change your toothbrush when the bristles are not standing up straight.

Dentures:

- Remove your dentures, plates and prostheses before cleaning your mouth.
- Brush and rinse your dentures after meals and at bedtime.
- Do not wear your dentures more than 16 hours a day. Take them out when you are sleeping.
- Rinse your dentures with mouth rinse when you remove them and before you put them in again.

Flossing:

- If you usually floss, keep flossing at least once per day with waxed floss.
- Stop flossing if your gums bleed for more than 2 minutes if you are on active chemotherapy and contact your healthcare team.

Rinsing:

- Rinse, swish and spit with a homemade mouth rinse (recipe on the previous page) several times after brushing, eating and as needed.
- Do not rinse with club soda. It is acidic and can irritate your mouth.
- Do not use store bought mouthwashes with alcohol (like Listerine® or Scope®). Ask your healthcare team to recommend a store bought mouthwash or make a homemade mouth rinse (see previous page).

Prevent dry mouth:

- To help relieve dry mouth, rinse your mouth with mouth rinse every 1 to 2 hours.
- Apply mouth lubricant (like Biotene Oral balance gel®) after you brush your teeth, at bedtime, and as needed.
- Spray your mouth with mouth rinse, water or artificial saliva products (like Moi-Stir Spray® or Biotene® products) as needed to keep it moist.
- Do not use glycerin or lemon-glycerin swabs. They can dry your mouth.
- Use sugarless gum or lozenges (like those sweetened with xylitol) as needed to help keep your mouth moist.
- Use a steam vaporizer at night to relieve nighttime dry mouth.

Lip Care:

- To keep your lips moist use animal or plant based lip balm (lanolin, beeswax, vit E) and avoid petroleum-based (Vaseline®).
- To protect your lips from the sun, use lip balm with SPF 30 or higher.
- Apply lip balm after brushing your teeth, at bedtime, and as needed.
- Do not touch any lip sores or lick your lips too often.
- Limit stress and sunlight if you have cold sores or have gotten them in the past.