

Oral Care for Oncology Patients

Oral complications occur in almost all patients receiving radiation for head and neck malignancies, in more than 75 % of bone marrow transplant recipients, and in nearly 40% of patients receiving chemotherapy. Some complications only occur during treatment; other, such as Dry mouth, may persist for many years after treatment and lead to serious oral condition.

Your mouth's major protective system comes from three pairs of salivary glands. Cancer treatments can cause dry mouth/salivary gland dysfunction increasing the risks of:

- Oral infections
- Compromises speaking, chewing and swallowing

Persistent dry mouth also increases:

- Decay
- Bad breath
- Gum disease

Oral complications during cancer treatment:

- **Mucositis/Stomatitis:** Mild to severe inflammation and ulceration of the mucous membranes: increased risk of pain, oral and systemic infection, and nutritional compromises.
- **Infection:** Bacterial, Viral and fungal: resulting from dry mouth, myelosuppression, and/or damage to the mucosa from chemotherapy/radiation.
- **Dental Decay and Demineralization:** Decay and erosion of the tooth's surface as a result of changes in both the quality and quantity of saliva from cancer treatment.
- **Bleeding:** From the decreased platelets.
- **Taste alternation:** Ranging from mild to severe and unpleasant to loss of taste.

Products available to help ease the discomfort of dry mouth include:

- Biotene products: → Mouthwash
→ Toothpaste

- Gum
- oral balance gel
- denture grip
- Moi-stir spray
- Mouthkote spray

If your mouth is sore

- Take small bites of food, chew slowly, and sip liquids with your meals.
- Avoid sharp, crunchy foods that could scrape or cut your mouth.
- Try a teaspoonful of oral balance moisturizing gel prior to meals to assist with swallowing.

**It is important to see your dentist 2 weeks before treatment begins or as soon as possible if treatment has already started. You can help prevent serious oral complications which are usually caused because a person's mouth is not healthy before cancer therapy starts. Not all oral complications can be avoided, but the fewer side effects you have the more likely you will stay on your cancer treatment schedule.

*Text source: Oral Care for Oncology Patients – Laclede, Inc.