

## What are cancer-related mouth problems?

The most common mouth problems for people with cancer are: dry mouth and lips, mouth sores, cold sores, sticky saliva, taste changes, trouble or pain with swallowing, too much saliva (spit), tooth and gum problems, a stiff jaw, bad breath, burning mouth and feeling thirsty.

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## What can I do to help my mouth problems?

### 1. Go to the dentist before you start cancer treatments

Chemotherapy puts you at risk of bleeding and infection. You will not be able to visit the dentist for a cleaning or other dental procedures until 4-6 weeks after your last chemotherapy treatment. If you need emergency dental work, tell your cancer care team. They will give you special instructions.

### 2. Keep your mouth clean

Keep your teeth, gums and mouth as clean as you can while you are getting cancer treatments.

Rinse your mouth:

- Homemade mouth rinse → mix together 1 teaspoon of salt, 1 teaspoon of baking soda and 4 cups of water. Keep the mouth rinse at room temperature and make a fresh batch every day.
- Rinse every 1-2 hours if your mouth is dry or sore. Otherwise 4-5 times a day.
- Rinse after eating meals or snack
- Put some mouth rinse into a smaller bottle to take with you when you go out
- Do not use mouthwashes with alcohol (like Scope and Listerine). They can dry out your mouth

Brush your teeth:

- Brush your teeth, gums and tongue after eating and before bed
- Use a small, soft, rounded-end, bristled toothbrush
- Run hot water over your toothbrush to soften the bristles before brushing
- Change your toothbrush when the bristles do not stand up straight or after you have been treated for an oral yeast infection

Other tips:

- Wash your hands often and keep them away from your mouth
- Limit stress and sunlight if you have cold sores or have gotten them in the past
- Do not touch any lips sores

### 3. Keep your mouth and lips moist

Moisturize your mouth:

- Use your homemade mouth rinse to keep your mouth moist
- If you suck on lozenges, make sure they are sugar free (sweeteners like Xylitol are okay)

Moisturize your lips:

- Use animal or plant based lip balms with bees-wax, lanolin or cocoa butter
- Do not use petroleum based lip balm

### 4. Change your diet

Eating and drinking can be uncomfortable if you have mouth problems from cancer and treatment.

Tips for eating when you have a sore mouth:

- Have room temperature food and drinks instead of hot and cold
- Try mashing, blending, chopping or grinding your food to make it softer
- Moisten food by adding olive oil, sauce, broth, sour cream, gravy or cream soup
- Do not eat spicy or acidic foods (like citrus, pickles or tomatoes) or drink fizzy drinks
- Avoid foods that are rough, dry or have sharp edges that might scratch

Tips for eating when you have a dry mouth:

- Carry a water bottle or thermos so you can drink whenever your mouth feels dry
- Warm liquids may help to clear thick saliva and wash down your food
- Suck on sugarless hard candies to make saliva
- Dunk solid foods in soup, milk or warm drinks to soften them
- Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, and cola), alcohol and smoking

Tips for eating when you have taste changes:

- Eat foods that need less chewing
- Try different forms of foods, like fresh, frozen or canned
- Experiment with foods, spices and seasonings

### 5. Quit smoking

Smoking can make your mouth problems worse but quitting is hard.

Your pharmacist or doctor can help you make a plan to quit smoking. They can:

- Suggest nicotine replacements (like the patch or gum)
- Refer you to a smoking cessation program