

Looking After Your Mouth



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As a result of your cancer treatment, you may be at risk of soreness and ulcers in your mouth and throat both during and after treatment. This leaflet gives you some detailed information on how best to look after yourself and deal with these effects.

What do I do before treatment begins?

- It is important that you have a check up with your own dentist before you start your treatment. Please let them know you are going to be having chemotherapy/ radiotherapy. If you are not registered with a dentist please let a member of staff know. We may be able to arrange for you to see the hospital dentist.

What should I do during treatment?

- Each morning, under a good light, have a close look in your mouth, including your lips and tongue. You are looking for any changes from what is normal for you.
- Brush all tooth surfaces with a soft toothbrush and a 'pea sized' amount of fluoride (minimum 1450ppm) toothpaste, two – four times daily; preferably after meals and before going to bed.
- Allow your toothbrush to air dry and store in a dry environment.
- If you are already using inter-dental brushes, continue with this for as long as it still feels comfortable. However, if you are receiving chemotherapy, please ask your hospital doctor or nurse about inter-dental cleaning as we may advise it is best not to at this time.
- Rinse your mouth with salt water mouthwash, four times a day. It can be useful after eating to remove any debris from your mouth. To make the mouthwash:

- » Dissolve one teaspoon of salt into 1 pint/570mls of tap water or cooled boiled water.
- » Use a cupful of the solution to rinse your mouth out after meals (with dentures removed) then spit out.
- » Discard any mouthwash left after 24 hours and make up a fresh mixture.
- Keep your lips moist by applying a water based lubricant. Please check with a member of staff if you are unsure which product to use.

What should I do after treatment ends?

- Continue to care for and look after your mouth just as you were doing during your treatment. Please also see your own dentist and hygienist within 3 months of finishing treatment and at least every 6 months afterwards.
- Please remind your dentist that you have had chemotherapy /radiotherapy.

What should I do if I have dentures?

- You should brush your dentures twice a day. Use a toothbrush or denture brush, an unperfumed liquid soap and water, or a non abrasive denture cleaner over a basin filled with water. Rinse them thoroughly in cold water before putting them back in your mouth.
- Cleaning and soaking of dentures with cleaning agents should only be done outside of the mouth.
- After meals, you should remove your dentures from your mouth and rinse thoroughly. If your mouth is sore or tender try to keep your dentures out as much as possible. You should store dentures in water when they are not in your mouth.

- Please remove your dentures each night. Rinse and clean as before, and soak overnight in water. The denture container should be cleaned daily.
- If you are being treated for an infection (e.g. thrush) in your mouth, dentures should be soaked in an appropriate cleaner. Plastic dentures should be soaked in dilute Milton (Sodium Hypochlorite) for 3 minutes, twice a day. Dentures with metal parts should be soaked in Chlorhexidine Gluconate 0.2% for 1 minute, twice a day. Rinse your dentures thoroughly before putting them back in your mouth.
- Change your toothbrush if you are being treated for an infection in your mouth.

Which mouthwash should I use?

Please note that during your treatment, only use products staff at the Beatson have suggested. In addition to the salt water mouth wash, we may also ask you to use one of the mouthwashes listed below. Check with a member of the hospital team if you are unsure about which mouthwash to use.

- **Sodium bicarbonate mouthwash**

This mouthwash can be useful to dissolve mucus in your mouth. To make the mouthwash:

- » Dissolve one teaspoon of sodium bicarbonate into 1 pint/570mls of tap water or cooled boiled water.
- » Use a cupful of the solution to rinse your mouth out before and after meals (with dentures removed) then spit out.
- » The mouthwash can be used every 1-2 hours for maximum effect.
- » Discard any mouthwash left after 24 hours and make up a fresh mixture.

- **Caphosol**

We may suggest this mouth rinse to prevent and treat the mouth ulcers and inflammation that may occur as a result of your treatment. To make the mouth rinse:

- » Dissolve the tablet in 50ml of water.
- » Swish and hold the solution in your mouth for 1 minute, then spit out and repeat with any remaining solution.
- » This should be done a minimum of 4 times a day, after food.
- » You should not eat for 30 minutes afterwards. A member of the hospital team will also explain how to use this product.

If you have a thrush infection in your mouth

- Continue with all of the routine mouth/denture care advice you have been given.
- Replace your toothbrush.

We may suggest a medicine to treat the infection such as:-

- **Nystatin**

- » Rinse 1ml of the liquid around your mouth for a minute, then swallow. Repeat 4 times a day, after food.
- » Try not to eat or drink for at least 30 minutes afterwards.

- **Fluconazole**

- » This is available as a capsule or liquid and is taken once a day.
- » This drug works through the bloodstream and so does not have to be rinsed around your mouth.

If you have a dry mouth

Your mouth may be dry as a result of surgery to your mouth, treatment or some of your medication. Keep your mouth and dentures as clean as possible and let a member of your hospital team know as soon as possible if you think there may be an infection. Keep a bottle of water to hand and take regular sips and drink plenty during meals. Try sucking on sugar free sweets or chewing gum.

We may also suggest you try a saliva replacement product such as:

- **Biotene Oral Balance**

This is a system which includes a gel, mouthwash, toothpaste and chewing gum.

- **GelClair**

This gel rinse is used for treating mouth ulcers and pain during your treatment. To use: pour the entire contents of the single-dose GelClair packet into a glass and add 1 tablespoon (15 ml) of water. If the solution is too thick, you can dilute it with an additional 1 to 2 tablespoons of water until you have a consistency you like. Stir the mixture well and use immediately. If water is not available, or if you prefer, GelClair may be used undiluted.

Rinse around your mouth for at least 1 minute or as long as possible to thoroughly coat all of your mouth tissue - tongue, palate, throat, and the inside of your cheeks. Spit out and avoid eating for a minimum of 30 minutes.

- **Saliva Orthana**

This is a saliva substitute which is sprayed directly onto the inside of each cheek and under your tongue. This is a pork-based product and is not suitable if you don't eat meat/pork.

Dry Lips

If the skin on your lips feels dry, you can apply a water based lubricant. Speak to your team who may be able to supply a cream.

While you are attending the Cancer Centre we will supply the products that we recommend for you. When your treatment is complete your GP can prescribe most of the products listed in this leaflet.

For further advice

Please ask us if:

- You have any questions about looking after your mouth.
- You think you may have thrush (white patches) or another infection in your mouth.
- Your mouth is sore or you develop ulcers in your mouth.
- You have difficulty eating or drinking.
- You need to see a dentist or dental hygienist.

Please remember that many of these things can be helped with advice and medication from your team, so it is important you let us know of any problems or concerns as soon as possible.

Your Clinical Nurse Specialist can be contacted on:

Care Opinion

We welcome your comments and feedback about our service.
If you would like to give us feedback please go to:

🌐 www.careopinion.org.uk or telephone:

☎ **0900 122 3135** or scan the QR code:

