

Mouth Care for Chemotherapy Patients

Chemotherapy (chemo) treatment may affect your mouth. Please use the information here to help manage mouth care.

Possible Problems

Chemo may cause the following:

- Sores (ulcers) in the mouth or throat.
- Infected sores.
- Painful mouth and/or gums.
- Burning, peeling or swelling of the tongue.
- Changes in consistency of saliva.
- Dry mouth.
- Changes in taste.
- Painful swallowing.
- Difficulty eating and talking.



You can see or feel most of these problems. Check your mouth every day.

Mouth Care

Ideally, visit your dentist a month or two before starting chemo. Inform your dentist and oncology team if you've had mouth or dental problems. These may include:

- Bleeding gums when brushing.
- Broken teeth or fillings.
- Sensitive teeth.
- Gum disease (periodontal disease/pyorrhea).
- Loose teeth.
- Persistent irritation from dentures.



The dentist will do a complete exam.

Use a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Do not use toothpaste with tartar/whitening control. Brush your teeth and tongue after each meal and at bedtime. Even if you are not eating, brush your teeth to remove the film and bacteria.

After brushing your teeth, rinse your mouth with baking soda solution. Mix 1/2 teaspoon baking soda in eight ounces of water. Swish gently and spit. Leukemia patients should ask their nurse for special baking soda rinse instructions. Do not use store-bought mouthwashes. They may contain alcohol or other chemicals that can irritate your mouth.

If you floss daily, use waxed floss. If flossing is not one of your routine habits, speak to your doctor before beginning. Do not floss if your platelets are below 50,000(50k/ul).

Dentures or Partial

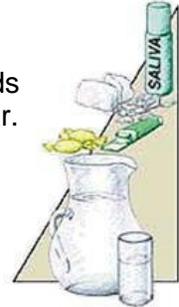
Be careful when putting in or taking out dentures or partial dentures. If your dentures/partial do not fit well, do not wear them. Wearing them may injure your oral tissues, which could delay your treatment. At bedtime soak dentures in a store-bought denture soak. Rinse them well with water before putting in your mouth. Remove your dentures on the days you receive chemo.

Dentures may increase nausea and vomiting with chemo. Do not wear dentures if your blood counts are low. Your oncology team will talk to you about your blood counts and tell you when you should leave your dentures out.

Preventing Dry Mouth and Lips

To help prevent drying of the mouth and lips:

- Rinse your mouth with water and/or baking soda solution as instructed.
- Drink eight to 12 eight-ounce glasses of non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated fluids each day. If you are drinking enough, your urine will be light colored or clear.
- Suck (do not chew) on ice chips or popsicles.
- Chew sugar-free gum.
- Use a saliva substitute if needed.
- Use lip balm as needed. Do not use petroleum jelly (Vaseline™).



Food Considerations

When choosing what to eat, know that soft foods with fewer spices are usually easier to tolerate. Also try to avoid temperature extremes. Lukewarm or cool foods are less irritating. Take small bites of food and chew slowly. Sip liquids with meals.

Choose soft, liquid, blended or moist foods. For example:

- Scrambled eggs.
- Finely ground meats with gravy.
- Oatmeal or other cooked cereals.
- Nutrition drinks.
- Milkshakes.
- Puddings.

Avoid foods that may irritate your mouth. For example:

- Acidic, such as oranges or other citrus.
- Spicy, such as hot peppers.
- Hard, such as potato chips or toast.



Sipping liquids with your meals will make eating easier.

Resources

For more information visit the National Institutes of Health website at www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/cancertreatment/chemotherapyYourMouth.htm.