

## Cancer Treatment-Related Mouth Sores, also known as “Mucositis”

The lining of the mouth, throat, and esophagus are very sensitive to radiation and chemotherapy (chemo). These treatments can cause these linings to become red, sore, and swollen. This is called mucositis. Sometimes white patchy areas develop, which can mean a fungal infection has developed. Your mouth may also become dry as less saliva is being made for a period. Your saliva may become thick and stringy. Taste buds can be affected, causing changes in the taste of foods and liquids. You may also notice a change in the texture of foods.

Symptoms of mucositis depend on treatment:

<b>Radiation</b>	Symptoms begin about the third week of treatment	Symptoms last for about 4-6 weeks
<b>Chemotherapy</b>	Symptoms often appear about 1-2 weeks into therapy	Symptoms improve as you recover from chemo
<b>Bone Marrow Transplant</b>	Symptoms often occur in the first week after chemo	Symptoms last until the white blood cell count returns

With proper care, these symptoms will heal. The healing process will vary for each patient. Please discuss your symptoms with your nurse or doctor.

### Tips to help reduce mucositis pain and promote healing:

- Frequent and thorough mouth care is very important.
- Replace your toothbrush every 1-2 weeks.
- Do not use mouthwash or rinses that contain alcohol or peroxide. Biotene® products are good to use.
- Ice chips and popsicles can be soothing.
- A soft diet may help to lessen discomfort. Avoid hot, spicy, or rough-textured foods (potato chips, toast, etc.).
- Use a water or petroleum-based moisturizer to protect your lips.

### How should I care for my mouth if I may get or have mucositis?

- Brush your teeth at least twice daily with a soft brush or toothette. Use a gentle fluoride toothpaste such as Biotene® or Sensodyne®. You may floss gently, if this has been a routine part of your dental hygiene and if your blood counts are not too low. Ask your doctor or nurse if flossing is okay. Check your tongue and mouth each day for redness or white patchy areas and, if found, report them to your doctor or nurse for treatment.
- Rinse your mouth after meals and at bedtime. Swish and gargle for 30 seconds then spit out. For hospitalized patients, you will be provided with normal saline. For

patients at home, use one of these solutions:

- Salt and baking soda: Mix  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of salt and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of baking soda in an 8oz glass of warm water.
  - Salt and water: Mix  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of salt in an 8oz glass of warm water.
  - Regular tap water.
- For thick saliva, rinse your mouth more often.
- Rinse or clean dentures after meals. You may want to wear your dentures only at meal times.
- Numbing gels, sprays, and lozenges may be used. Ask your doctor or nurse if pain medicines are okay to use.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol. Both can dry and irritate the linings of your mouth.
- Avoid spicy, hot, rough, or coarse foods. Soft, bland, wet foods that are high calorie and high in protein are good to eat. Moisten food with sauces and gravy.
- You may want to avoid citrus juices until your treatment is over and your mouth is healed. Sometimes watering down citrus juices can make them easier to drink.
- Cancer treatments can make your teeth more at risk for decay. Special fluoride rinses can help prevent this. Your doctor may also want you to see your dentist before starting treatment.
- Visit your dentist after you finish your cancer treatment. You should tell your dentist about your treatments. Contact your cancer doctor or nurse before having oral surgery, or any other dental work.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2018 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4494.