

## Mouth Care during Chemotherapy and Radiation Treatments

Oral complications are common in patients receiving chemotherapy or undergoing radiation therapy to the head or neck area. These complications may be of short duration (generally with chemotherapy) and improve when the treatment is completed. Some may be long term (generally with radiation therapy).

Not all patients will experience all or any of these complications or side effects.

### Side effects may include:

- Dry mouth
- Soreness and ulceration
- Changes in taste
- Bleeding gums
- Infection
- Inflammation of the lining of the mouth or throat (mucositis)

### Long term complications may include:

- Dryness of mouth caused by lack of saliva production (xerostoma)
- Tooth decay and gum disease (if proper dental care is not achieved)
- Functional disabilities or impairment
- Abnormal dental development in children

Patients should discuss any symptoms or side effects they experience with their treating physician, treatment centre or their dentist.

### Pre-treatment prevention:

Oral complications may be reduced by preventative measures being taken before any treatment begins. This includes:

- Having a complete oral health check by a dentist familiar with oral side effects of cancer treatments
- Eating a well-balanced diet - seek the advice of your dentist and/or dietician to see if there are foods that should be avoided
- Learning how to care for your mouth during and after treatment
- Begin using fluoride gel several days before treatment begins

Patients undergoing high dose chemotherapy, stem cell transplant, and/or radiation therapy need an oral care plan in place before treatment begins, to see their dentist during treatment and then to commit to regular dental checks for the rest of their lives.

## Mouth care during treatment:

- Gently brush teeth, gums, tongue, or dentures after every meal and before bed
- Use an extra soft toothbrush, softened in hot water if necessary
- Use a mild tasting fluoride toothpaste
- Rinse the mouth after brushing, eating or drinking, using one of the following:
  - 1 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of water
  - 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of water
  - 1/2 teaspoon of salt and 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of water(Rinse with plain water after any of the above)
- Prevent lips from drying and cracking using lip balm
- Check mouth, lips and tongue daily
- Keep mouth fresh and moist (you can spray mouth with vegetable oil between meals)
- Don't wear dentures during treatment if inflammation or ulcers occur
- Remove plates or dentures at night and soak in a solution of 1/2 vinegar, 1/2 water or denture cleaner. Rinse thoroughly before wearing
- Avoid rinses containing alcohol
- Avoid neat spirits, tobacco, acidic drinks, hot spices, vinegar, very salty foods or dry foods
- Moisten foods by using sauces and gravies
- You may be asked to undertake some jaw exercises
- Drink sufficient fluid – keep sipping small amounts throughout the day
- Keep appointments with your dentist

## Inform your doctor if you develop:

- Ulcers in your mouth
- Difficulty eating and drinking
- Bleeding in your mouth
- Inability to swallow

You can also get further information and support by calling  
the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20