

Mouth Care During Chemotherapy



Mouth sores (stomatitis) and dry mouth are common side effects of chemotherapy. These side effects occur because the medicines affect normal cells as well as cancer cells. The best way to help mouth sores is to prevent them or manage them early. The tips below can help you feel better.

Remedies that help

- Rinse your mouth several times a day. Use ½ teaspoon of baking soda and ½ teaspoon of salt mixed in 1 cup (8 ounces) of warm water. Swish and spit. This helps keep your mouth free of germs.
- Use products that coat and protect your mouth and throat. Or use medicines that coat and soothe mouth sores. Your healthcare provider will instruct you on products and medicines you can use.
- Numb your mouth and throat with topical sprays or lozenges to make eating easier. Ask your healthcare provider which products or medicines are best to use.

Prevent mouth sores

- Use a flashlight and mirror to check your mouth daily. Report any new sores, red areas, or white patches to your healthcare provider.
- Buy an extra soft toothbrush or foam brush and mild toothpaste. Check with your healthcare provider about whether to use fluoride toothpaste.
- Gently brush your teeth and gums 2 times a day with a soft toothbrush or foam swab. Check with your healthcare provider before flossing teeth. Report any extra bleeding when you floss.
- Have your dentist treat any dental problems before your therapy begins.
- Don't use cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and alcohol.
- If you wear dentures or other oral devices, keep them out as much as possible, brush and rinse after meals and before bed. Soak them in cleansing solution at night.



Moisten a dry mouth

- Drink plenty of water. Take frequent sips or suck on ice chips.
- Suck on sugar-free candy and lozenges. Chew sugar-free gum.
- Use products that moisten the mouth if your healthcare provider advises them.
- Apply lip balm to help prevent dry lips.
- Don't use mouthwash that contains alcohol.

Choose foods less likely to irritate

Try foods that are:

- Soft and go down smoothly, such as a milkshake or food puréed with a blender
- Served cold or at room temperature
- Cooked until tender and cut into small pieces

Don't eat foods that are:

- Sharp or crunchy
- Hot, dry, salty, or spicy
- Acidic, such as citrus fruits

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following:

- Mouth cuts or sores
- Mouth pain that keeps you from swallowing liquids, eating, taking medicines, or resting
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- White patches on your tongue or inside your mouth

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