

## **Mucositis and Other Side effects to Expect**

Patients undergoing radiotherapy can experience several unwanted oral side effects, which have both short-term and long-term implications.

### **Common short-term side effects include:**

- Cellulitis - bacterial skin infection
- Mucositis - inflammation/ulceration of the soft tissues
- Dysphagia - difficulty swallowing
- Dysgeusia - foul, salty, or metallic taste sensation persists in the mouth
- Weight loss

### **Common long-term side effects include:**

- Rampant caries - rapidly growing dental decay
- Trismus - muscle spasms and limited mouth opening
- Xerostomia - dry mouth
- Osteoradionecrosis (ORN) - bone death after radiation therapy

### **About ORN**

Osteoradionecrosis (ORN) is a severe, late complication of radiation therapy, commonly affecting the bones in the head and neck region, particularly the mandible (lower jaw). Dental extraction in the irradiated areas post radiotherapy (>50 Gy) remains the main risk factor for ORN. Post-radiation infections can also contribute to the development of ORN.

People experience persistent pain, ranging from mild to severe in the affected area, and possible loss of substantial amount of bone tissue leading to pathological fractures in some cases. Management of ORN is difficult and can involve significant time and cost.

Thorough dental examination and proper treatment of any dental issues before starting radiation therapy is crucial for the prevention of ORN.