

**Mouth sores (oral mucositis) are a common side effect of cancer treatment, especially chemotherapy and radiation to the head and neck.** They usually appear 1 to 2 weeks after starting treatment and can make eating, drinking, and speaking uncomfortable<sup>15</sup>. These sores may take 2 to 4 weeks to heal after treatment ends<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Symptoms may include:**

- Redness, soreness, or ulcers in the mouth
- Cracks, blisters, or white patches
- Pain in the gums, tongue, or jaw
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, or tasting food<sup>35</sup>

#### **Care and management tips:**

- **Rinse your mouth regularly** with a solution of baking soda and salt in warm water (for example, 1 teaspoon of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of salt in 4 cups of water), especially before and after meals and at bedtime<sup>58</sup>.
- **Use a soft-bristled toothbrush** and avoid toothpastes with abrasives or whitening agents<sup>5</sup>.
- **Avoid spicy, acidic, sharp, or coarse foods** (such as chips, citrus, or tomatoes). Choose soft, bland foods like pudding, eggs, milkshakes, or cream-based soups<sup>5</sup>.
- **Stay hydrated** with mild, cool, or warm fluids, and consider sucking on ice chips or eating cold fruits like watermelon or popsicles to soothe discomfort<sup>52</sup>.
- **Moisturize your lips** with a non-glycerin, non-petroleum jelly-based product<sup>5</sup>.
- **Keep dentures clean** and out as much as possible if you wear them<sup>5</sup>.

#### **Medical treatments:**

- **Pain relief** can include mouthwashes, gels, sprays, or prescribed painkillers (sometimes even morphine-based rinses for severe pain)<sup>671</sup>.
- **Low-level laser therapy (photobiomodulation)** may help prevent and speed healing of mouth sores, especially in those receiving head and neck radiation or stem cell

transplants<sup>1</sup>.

- **Other options** under study include benzylamine mouthwash, glutamine supplements, and honey for their anti-inflammatory effects<sup>1</sup>.

**When to contact your care team:**

- If you have severe pain or cannot eat/drink enough
- If you notice bleeding, white patches, or signs of infection
- If sores are worsening or not improving

**Prompt communication with your oncology team is important**—they can adjust your treatment, prescribe medications, or refer you to specialists to help manage symptoms and prevent complications<sup>35</sup>.

1. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/mouth-sores.html>
2. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cancer/in-depth/mouth-sores/art-20045486>
3. <https://www.roswellpark.org/cancertalk/202402/mouth-sores-chemotherapy-radiation>
4. <https://www.mdanderson.org/patients-family/diagnosis-treatment/emotional-physical-effects/oral-care.html>
5. <https://www.moffitt.org/endeavor/archive/chemo-mouth-its-real-common-and-manageable/>
6. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mucositis/>
7. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/cancer-drugs/side-effects/your-mouth>
8. <https://www.webmd.com/cancer/chemo-mouth-sores>