

Oral Care

Good oral care is important during your cancer treatment and recovery. Some cancer treatments, like chemotherapy and radiation therapy, can cause a sore mouth. To keep your mouth clean and healthy, follow the tips in this handout.

A Word of Caution

Some oral symptoms can be serious. Let your doctor or nurse know if you experience any of the following problems:

- Mouth redness, soreness, or pain
- Cracks in your lips
- Mouth ulcers or blisters
- White patches in your mouth or on your tongue
- Burning feeling in your mouth or throat or on your tongue
- Any oral symptoms that cause problems with eating, drinking, or swallowing

Caring for Your Teeth and Gums

- Rinse your mouth regularly with water.
- Avoid using mouthwashes and mouth rinses that contain alcohol.
- Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush and toothpaste with fluoride within 30 minutes after eating and at bedtime. You can also use Toothette oral swabs in place of a toothbrush.
- Soak your toothbrush in warm water for a minute or two before brushing to soften bristles. Then brush with gentle pressure.
- Gently floss your teeth and gums at least once a day after brushing. Use dental floss in an up-and-down motion.
- Replace your toothbrush every month or two.
- If you are being treated for thrush by your doctor, replace your toothbrush every few days. Also, sanitize your toothbrush after each use by soaking it in mouthwash for 30 seconds, or consider using disposable toothbrushes.
- Visit your dentist at least once a year for a complete oral checkup.
- Be sure to see your dentist before you begin cancer treatment or if you have tooth pain.

Quick Tip: Avoid Things That May Irritate Your Mouth

To reduce your risk of mouth sores and irritation, avoid the following:

- Alcohol
- Foods that are hard and coarse
- Foods and beverages that are spicy, acidic, or highly seasoned
- Cigarettes, pipe smoking, and chewing tobacco

Caring for Dentures or Dental Plates

- Remove dentures or dental plates and brush them within 30 minutes of eating and before bedtime.
- Clean dentures and dental plates in effervescent denture cleansers (cleansers that bubble). Rinse them well before wearing.
- Do not wear dentures or dental plates that do not fit well. Call your dentist to have them adjusted or repaired.
- Do not wear dentures or dental plates while sleeping.

How to Keep Your Mouth and Lips Moist

- To relieve dry lips, apply petroleum jelly, lipstick, lip balm, or cocoa butter.
- To moisten a dry mouth, try a water-based mouth moisturizer.
- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day.