

Physical Concerns – Mouth Sores

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/mouthsores>

Mucositis is a medical term for swelling inside the mouth and throat that is caused by complications of cancer treatment. This reaction may cause painful ulcers, mouth sores or can lead to infection. This can interfere with eating, talking, taste, chewing or swallowing and often lasts days to weeks. Talk with your doctor if you notice pain or other changes in your mouth during cancer treatment.

Managing mouth sores

Some suggestions and options for preventing and treating mouth sores:

- Suck on ice chips immediately before and during each chemotherapy treatment. Keeping the mouth COLD may prevent mucositis caused by certain types of chemotherapy.
- Your doctor may recommend specific pain-relief strategies if you develop mouth sores. Options your doctor may recommend might include the following:
 - Prescribing a mouthwash solution that may contain a numbing and/or a coating medication to reduce pain and promote healing
 - Over-the-counter pain medication or prescription pain medication
 - It is important to avoid taking aspirin during cancer treatment unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

The following suggestions below may help you take special care of your mouth during treatment:

- Visit a dentist as soon as possible before starting radiation therapy to the head and neck. There are some dentists, called oncologic dentists, who specialize in dental care for cancer patients but they may be difficult to find. Generally, you want to remove any risk for infection as soon as possible with minimal intervention.
- Brush your teeth gently with fluoride toothpaste several times a day. If mouth sores are severe, you can purchase without a prescription a sponge on a stick (called toothette) to use instead of a toothbrush. Floss gently.
- Rinse or gargle with a solution of either 1/4 teaspoon of salt or 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup (8 ounces) of warm water. Follow with a plain water rinse.
- Avoid mouthwashes or rinses that have alcohol in them.
- Lessen the time that you wear your dentures. Avoid wearing them at night, and consider removing them between meals to help reduce mouth irritation.
- Choose foods that require little or no chewing.
- Avoid acidic, spicy, salty, coarse, and dry foods.

Adapted from: www.cancer.net <https://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/side-effects/mouth-sores-or-mucositis>

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Mouth Sores](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Mouth Sores or Mucositis](#)
- [NIH, Head and Neck Radiation Treatment and Your Mouth](#)
- [NIH, Chemotherapy and Your Mouth](#)
- [NIH, Oral Complications of Chemotherapy and Head/Neck Radiation \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [NIH, Mouth and Throat Problems](#)
- [ASCO answers, Dental and Oral Health](#)
- [Chemocare, Mouth Sores due to Chemotherapy](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Coping With Mouth Sores During Treatment](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Managing Oral Mucositis](#)

Información Española

- [NIH, Problemas en la boca y en la garganta](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Llagas en la boca o mucositis](#)
- [Chemocare, Llagas en la boca debidas a la quimioterapia](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Datos sobre el dolor causado por el cáncer](#)