

INSTRUCTION FOR PATIENTS UNDERGOING RADIATION THERAPY

The radiation therapy that you are going to receive for your cancer treatment may cause side effects that can affect your teeth and jaws. You are here to prevent or minimize these problems. Everyone responds differently to treatment; you may have all or none of the problems associated with radiation therapy. Some problems may last only a short time, while others may become permanent.

DRYNESS: Your *mouth* may become *dry* due to a reduced saliva production. *Dry mouth* or thick saliva is often noticed during the first weeks of radiation. The dryness will persist after the radiation therapy is completed. The reduced saliva may lead to severe tooth decay. Trays will be provided to administer fluoride for the prevention of this decay. Additionally, the use of a fluoride gel and good tooth brushing habits are essential in the prevention of decay.

TASTE: Most people experience a *partial loss of taste* during radiation therapy. Usually, this *partial loss of taste* is temporary. The recovery of the ability to taste may take months after completing treatment.

SORE MOUTH: The *soft tissue* of the mouth may become sensitive and irritated. The lips may crack and peel. Mouth sores may develop during radiation therapy. The soreness usually disappears after radiation is completed. Your doctor may be able to prescribe medication to help.

TOOTH EXTRACTION: Radiation therapy affects the ability of the jaw bone to heal and can affect the area permanently. Any teeth in the field of radiation that may potentially cause a problem need to be removed before radiation therapy begins, and the tissue needs to heal. Removing a tooth after radiation therapy is a very involved process and as a result, special precautions must be taken to avoid complications.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR MANAGING *MOUTH* DISCOMFORT

DRYNESS:

- 1 - Drink plenty of water but, **DO NOT** drink liquids with **SUGAR**, as they will promote as well as accelerate tooth decay.
- 2 - Allow ice chips to melt in your mouth.
- 3 - **SUGARLESS** gum or candy may be of some help to stimulate saliva.
- 4 - Artificial saliva's purchased at a drug store such as *Moi-Stir*, *Salivart*, *Orex*, *Xero-Lube* and others may provide relief. (Make your own lubricant by mixing 1/4 teaspoon of glycerin in 8 ounces of water.)
- 5 - Keep lips lubricated with petrolatum.
- 6 - **AVOID** mouthwashes containing alcohol, coffee, tea, colas, alcohol drinks and tobacco as they tend to irritate and dry the mouth.

CHEWING AND SWALLOWING:

- 1 - Moisten foods with mayonnaise, sauces, gravies, yogurts, or salad dressings.
- 2 - Soften or thin foods with skim milk, broth, water or melted margarine. Use a food processor or blender to finely chop or liquefy foods.
- 3- Sip liquids often while eating.
- 4 - Rinse mouth with a baking soda solution before and after meals.
Mix 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of water OR use *Gelusil* and hold it in your mouth, swish and swallow.

IMPORTANT: DO NOT SWALLOW THE SOLUTION!

DISCOMFORT WHILE EATING:

- 1 - Eat smooth, soft, creamy foods like soup, pastas with cream sauce, mashed potatoes, casseroles, pudding, ice cream or simmered meats.
- 2 - Drink cold drinks such as milk shakes, instant breakfast drinks, or liquid nutritional supplements such as *Ensure* or *Meritene*.
- 3 - Fruit juice popsicles, ice chips, or other cold foods may decrease discomfort.
- 4 - **AVOID FOODS such as** salty, acidic or spicy food (e.g. tomato sauce, citrus juices); carbonated beverages; hot foods; or hard, crunchy foods such as chips, bread crusts, or popcorn. Room temperature foods are best.

TEETH AND GUM CARE:

- 1 - Brush after meals with a soft tooth brush and a bland fluoride toothpaste (e.g., *Aim*, *Crest*, *Colgate*.)

IMPORTANT! DO NOT USE TARTAR OR WHITENING TOOTHPASTE!

- 2 - An extra-soft toothbrush, cotton-tip swabs (*Q-tips*), a wet gauze pad, or foam sticks (*Toothette*) may be less irritating and can provide mechanical cleaning.

- 3 - A pulsating water device (e.g., *Water-Pik*), will remove some debris. Use warm water with 2 teaspoon of salt and 2 teaspoon of baking soda and apply **minimal pressure** to prevent damage to the tissue. The same solution can be used in a suspended enema bag for less discomfort.
- 4 - Floss after meals being careful not to cut the gums.
- 5 - Use fluoride trays and gel daily until told to discontinue use by your doctor.
- 6 - See your dentist for an exam and a cleaning every 3 months after therapy.

TREATMENT TO EASE SIDE EFFECTS:

- 1 - Soothing rinse: Mix half and half, *Mylanta* or *Maloox* and alcohol-free *Benedryl Elixir*. Hold, swish and swallow.
- 2 - Over the counter remedies which may help soreness: *Xylocaine (Lidocaine) 2 % Jelly*, *Orabase B*, *Zilacten B*, *Orajel*.