



# What can I do about Oral Mucositis?

Cancer treatment can cause redness, sores or infection in your mouth. This problem is called **oral mucositis**. It can be painful and make it hard to eat.

Check your mouth each day for redness, swelling, sores or white patches. Tell your doctor or nurse if you have any of these problems.

## What works for oral mucositis?

- Do routine mouthcare **each day**. This is the **best** way to prevent and treat oral mucositis. Studies have shown that making this part of your daily routine works. Start **before** you have any problems.
  - ◆ Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush after each meal and before bed.
  - ◆ If you floss your teeth, continue to do so, unless you have been told not to by your doctor or nurse.
  - ◆ Rinse your mouth at least 4 times a day. Do this after meals and before bed with the mix shown below. Do this more often if your mouth is sore, you have thick mucus, or you have been told to do so.

### Mouth rinse mixture

1. Mix 1 teaspoon baking soda and 1 teaspoon of salt in 4 cups of water and shake.
2. Swish around in your mouth, gargle and then spit out.
3. Put in a covered container and keep at room temperature.
4. Throw it away and make a new batch each day.

- Use a moisturizer on your lips that does not contain glycerin or petroleum jelly. These will make your lips drier.
- Don't use mouthwash that contains alcohol because it can cause more pain and irritation.
- If you wear dentures or other oral devices:
  - ◆ Keep them out as much as you can
  - ◆ Brush and rinse them after meals and before bed
  - ◆ Soak them in cleansing solution for at least 8 hours

## Things that might help

- Don't smoke or drink alcohol
- Don't eat spicy, acidic (such as grapefruit), very hot or rough foods (such as chips or nuts). These can cause more irritation. Eat soft foods.
- If you are using pain medicine, take it before you eat.
- If you are using oral gels for short term pain relief, be aware they can make it hard for you to swallow. **Be careful you don't choke.**
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids to keep your mouth moist.

## Other information

- Ask your cancer doctor if you should see your dentist before you start treatment.
- Many home remedies, herbal supplements and mouth rinses have been studied to see if they can prevent or treat oral mucositis. None have been shown to work. **Don't use any other remedies unless you talk to your doctor or nurse first.**
- **If you are having trouble eating tell your doctor or nurse.** Ask if seeing a dietician or if taking a diet supplement might help.
- With some types of chemotherapy, sucking on ice before and during treatment, called cryotherapy, helps prevent mucositis. Ask your doctor or nurse if this works for the type of chemotherapy you are getting.

## Notes

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*Note.* This handout is a free educational resource for nurses and other care providers in need of concise, easy-to-understand information about the symptom described. It is a brief summary and may not be appropriate for all circumstances and individuals. Nurses using this handout should use clinical judgment and consult with other professionals as needed regarding specific safe and appropriate practices.

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