

# MANAGING CHEMOTHERAPY SIDE EFFECTS

## MOUTH AND THROAT CHANGES

**These are general guidelines only and are not intended to replace talking with your health care providers. Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse about any side effects that you notice.**

### Introduction

The mouth is a very sensitive part of the body. It contains millions of nerve endings and specialized cells that can easily be affected by chemotherapy. The symptoms you may get include:

- Dry mouth and lips
- Sores in your mouth
- Cold sores
- Thick mucous

Although these problems are not pleasant, they are common and can be reduced. Please tell a member of your healthcare team about any mouth problems, even if you feel better at your next visit.

Mouth problems may begin 5 to 7 days after your treatment and usually last only a few days.

### Tell your doctor or nurse if you have:

- Trouble eating or swallowing
- White or yellow spots in your mouth
- Red or inflamed areas in your mouth
- Sores or ulcers on your lips or in your mouth
- Any bleeding in your mouth or throat
- Changes in taste or smell
- Dry mouth
- Pain when you are eating or drinking or when talking. Ask about medicine for pain if your moth or throat is sore.

It is important to have a check-up with your dentist before beginning treatment. If you have any dental problems these may become worse and may lead to infection without proper dental care.

Use the following steps to help prevent or reduce mouth or throat symptoms related to your chemotherapy. Check your mouth each day for changes. Report any changes to your nurse.

### **Cleanse your mouth with care**

- Brush your teeth and tongue for at least 90 seconds after each meal and before you go to bed. Use a very soft toothbrush.
- Use toothpaste or gel that has fluoride and baking soda in it.
- Rinse your mouth with baking soda, salt and water mix as noted below. Do this at least 4 times a day.

- 1 cup of water
- 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda
- 1/8 teaspoon of salt

Take small sips and swish them around in your mouth.

- You may also use a commercial mouthwash, but DO NOT use products that contain alcohol – the alcohol will worsen pain if there are any open sores. Your pharmacist or nurse can help you choose a good mouthwash product.
- If you already floss your teeth, continue to do so at least once a day. Stop flossing if bleeding occurs.
- Brush and rinse your dentures after eating. Have loose dentures adjusted. Remove your dentures to clean them and while sleeping.

### **Keep your mouth and lips moist**

- Use a lip balm, such as Chapstick®
- Sip water or suck ice chips
- Try drinking through a straw
- Try to limit exposure to the sun. Sun can make cold sores and dry lips worse. If you are going to be in the sun longer than 10-15 minutes, use a sun block lip balm (with sun screen 15 SPF or higher). Avoid sunscreens with PABA.
- Wear a hat and sunglasses



### **Eat soft, bland foods**

- Choose foods that are soft, wet and easy to swallow. When your mouth is sore, try cooked cereals, mashed potatoes and scrambled eggs.
- Soften foods with gravy.
- Let food cool down if hot food hurts your mouth.
- Ask to see a dietician

### **Don't have things that can make your mouth hurt**

- Don't drink orange, lemon, tomato or grapefruit juice.
- Don't drink alcohol.
- Don't eat crunchy or spicy foods.
- Don't have foods or drinks that have sugar in them, such as candy and soft drinks.
- Don't smoke cigarettes or use tobacco products.

If you have a sore throat, severe mouth sores, chills or a temperature over 38°C or 100°F phone your doctor or nurse.

