

Radiation Therapy to the Mouth and Neck

About 2 weeks after your first treatment, you may notice skin changes around your mouth and throat. These changes are a part of your therapy and are short-term. The following instructions will help you care for these areas and decrease the effects of radiation.

Skin Care

- If marker was used on your skin in the treatment area for positioning, do not remove the marks. These outline the area to be treated and must remain in place until treatments are completed. Wash with lukewarm water only and pat dry. Do not scrub.
- Your health care team can recommend a lotion to apply to the skin in the treatment area. Avoid all other soaps, lotions, ointments, cosmetics, and perfumed powders on the treatment area.
- Use only an electric razor to shave.
- Do not use heating pads or ice bags on the treatment area.
- Keep the treated area out of the sun.
- Skin changes such as redness, dryness, peeling, and tanning can happen. Itching and dryness may occur. Do not scratch your skin. Please report any break in the skin to the doctor or nurse.
- Avoid tight fitting clothing around your neck.
- Wear dentures as little as possible.

Mouth Care

- Good mouth care may not prevent side effects but will help to prevent infection, improve your appetite and protect your teeth and gum tissue.
- Instructions regarding dental care will be given by the doctor.
- You may be referred to a dentist for preventative care before your therapy begins.
- Use a soft bristle toothbrush after meals and at bedtime.
- Use a mouthwash made of 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon baking soda, and 4 cups of lukewarm water.
Gargle with this mouthwash every hour; at least 6 to 10 times per day.

- Do not use a store bought mouthwash as it contains high amounts of alcohol.
- Stay away from alcoholic and carbonated drinks, tobacco, acidic juices and foods (such as orange juice), and highly seasoned foods.
- Stay away from rough, crunchy foods such as potato chips, nuts, and pretzels. You should not eat foods that are very hot or cold.
- The saliva in your mouth may become thick or decrease during your treatment. Foods are easier to chew and swallow if they are served with liquids such as gravy, broths, or sauces.
- If mouth or throat pain requires special medicine, it will be prescribed by the doctor.

Diet

- It is important that you eat enough calories and protein during your treatment to maintain your weight.
- Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of liquid each day (not including coffee or tea). Make sure to have liquids with your meals.
- Eat soft foods. Pureed or finely chopped cooked meats, fruits and vegetables. High-protein milkshakes, Carnation Instant Breakfast Drink, Ensure and Boost are nutritious and easy to swallow.
- Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day instead of three large meals.
- If you experience mouth or throat pain that interferes with your eating or drinking please inform your radiation team. There may be medications that can help.
- If you have difficulty swallowing your medications, check with your pharmacist before crushing any medication.
- You may take one multi-vitamin daily. Do not take anti-oxidants or mega-vitamins during your radiation therapy.

Dry Mouth

- Chew sugar-free gum or hard candy.
- Carry a bottle of water with you at all times.
- Follow the mouth care instructions on the previous page.
- Sip fluids with meals to help with swallowing.

- Run a clod air humidifier in your main living area during the day and in your bedroom at night.
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco.
- Gargle with the mouthwash listed on the previous page before meals.

Taste Changes

- Your sense of taste may change during radiation therapy.
- Try different foods and seasonings (avoid anything too spicy).
- Meat commonly becomes distasteful during treatment. To keep up with your protein intake, try cheese, milk, eggs, poultry and fish.

General

- You may take one multi-vitamin daily. Do not take anti-oxidants or mega-vitamins during your radiation therapy.
- It is important to use birth control during treatment and for some time after treatment completes.

Please remember, if you have any questions or concerns, please ask your radiation team or call us at (315) 464-5276. We will be happy to answer your questions.