Mouth and Throat Changes

Call your doctor or nurse if you have:
- Trouble eating or swallowing
- Painful spots or sores in your mouth
- Sores on your lips or in your mouth

Tell your doctor or nurse if you have:
- Changes in taste or smell
- Dry mouth (little or no saliva)
- Pain when you eat hot or cold foods

Take these steps:

Clean your mouth with care.
- Brush your teeth and tongue after each meal and before you go to bed. Use a very soft toothbrush or cotton swabs.
- Use toothpaste or gel that has fluoride in it.
- Rinse your mouth with the baking soda, salt, and water mix in the box below.

Every 3 hours during the day, mix together:
- 1 cup warm water,
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda, and
- 1/8 teaspoon salt.

Take small sips and swish them around in your mouth. Then rinse with plain water.

“My mouth felt sore. I let my nurse know right away. He told me about medicine that can help. He also showed me how to make a mouth rinse to use each day.”
Managing Chemotherapy Side Effects: Mouth and Throat Changes

Keep your mouth and lips moist.
- Use a lip balm.
- Sip water or suck ice chips.
- Try drinking through a straw.

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 food with gravy, sauce, or other liquids.
- Let food cool down if hot food hurts your mouth.

Don’t have things that can make your mouth hurt.
- Don’t drink orange, lemon, tomato, or grapefruit juice.
- Don’t drink alcohol, such as beer or wine.
- 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 other tobacco products.

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:
1. What problems should I call you about?
2. What foods and drinks should I have?
3. Can we make the baking soda, salt, and water mix together?
4. What kind of toothpaste is best for me?
5. If brushing hurts, what are other ways that I can clean my mouth?
6. What medicines can help?

Visit a dentist at least 2 weeks before you start treatment. Get all of your dental work done before you start chemotherapy, if at all possible. Get a copy of the report from your dentist and give it to your doctor or nurse.

Ask for pain medicine if your mouth or throat is sore.

How can we help?
National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service
Phone: 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER)
Web: www.cancer.gov
Online Chat: www.cancer.gov/livehelp

NCI has a series of 18 Chemotherapy Side Effects Sheets at:
www.cancer.gov/chemo-side-effects

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