

Mouth Sores

Online version with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/mouthsores>

Feeling pain in your mouth?

Some people develop sores in their mouth and throat as a side effect of their cancer treatment. Some treatments are more likely than others to cause mouth sores. Mouth sores may appear 1 - 2 weeks after the start of treatment and may come and go if treatment is given in cycles. Good mouth care is key to help reduce the risk or severity of mouth sores.

Mucositis is the medical term for swelling inside the mouth and throat. This reaction is what causes mouth sores or even painful ulcers of which both can lead to infection. If you notice pain or other changes in your mouth during cancer treatment, talk to your cancer care team.

There are things you can do to help prevent or manage mouth sores. Your cancer care team can help you manage painful mouth sores or any discomfort they may cause you.

Content adapted from websites below.

Taking care of your mouth before

- Visit a dentist before starting treatment, if possible, especially for radiation therapy to the head and neck. Dentists, called oncologic dentists, specialize in dental care for cancer patients, but they may be difficult to find. Seeing a dentist and receiving care, will generally help to remove any risk for infection related to existing tooth or gum issues.
- It is important to avoid taking aspirin during cancer treatment unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

Taking care of your mouth during treatment

- Suck on ice chips immediately before and during each chemotherapy treatment. Keeping the mouth COLD may prevent mucositis caused by certain types of chemotherapy.
- Brush your teeth very gently with a soft brush and toothpaste several times a day during treatment.
- If mouth sores develop and are severe, try a sponge on a stick, called a toothette, instead of a toothbrush. Floss very gently.
- Rinse or gargle with a solution of either 1/4 teaspoon of salt or 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup (8 ounces) of warm water. Follow with a plain water rinse.
- Avoid mouthwashes or rinses that have alcohol in them.
- Lessen the time that you wear your dentures. Avoid wearing them at night and consider removing them between meals to help reduce mouth irritation.
- Choose foods that require little or no chewing.
- Avoid acidic, spicy, salty, coarse, and dry foods.
- Stay hydrated by drinking water

Options your doctor may recommend to manage:

- Offer specific pain-relief strategies based on severity and how they affect your ability to eat and drink
- Suggest over-the-counter or prescription pain medication
- Prescribe a mouthwash solution that may contain a numbing and/or a coating medication to reduce pain and promote healing
- Assess treatment doses

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Mouth Sores](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Mouth Sores or Mucositis](#)
- [NIH, Head and Neck Radiation Treatment and Your Mouth](#)
- [NIH, Chemotherapy and Your Mouth](#)
- [NIH, Oral Complications of Chemotherapy and Head/Neck Radiation \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [NIH, Mouth and Throat Problems](#)
- [ASCO answers, Dental and Oral Health](#)
- [Chemocare, Mouth Sores due to Chemotherapy](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Coping With Mouth Sores During Treatment](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Managing Oral Mucositis](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [NIH, Problemas en la boca y en la garganta](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Llagas en la boca o mucositis](#)
- [Chemocare, Llagas en la boca debidas a la quimioterapia](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Datos sobre el dolor causado por el cáncer](#)