

Department of Oral & Maxillofacial surgery

Taking good care of your teeth

This information is aimed at patients with a diagnosis of head and neck cancer who are having radiotherapy or chemotherapy which may affect the mouth and teeth.

General advice on looking after your teeth:

- **It is essential that you register with a dentist.**
- Brush your teeth **at least** twice daily with a small headed medium toothbrush **before breakfast** and **last thing at night**.
- Clean in between your teeth using recommended products, such as dental floss, dental tape, or inter-dental brushes on a daily basis.
- Use disclosing tablets once a week after brushing at night to see how well you are brushing and go back and brush again the bits you have missed.
- At night after brushing, rub toothpaste onto the edge of fillings and the teeth with your finger.
- Use an **alcohol free** fluoride mouth rinse such as Fluoriguard™ in the mornings after breakfast.
- Sensodyne F™ and Fluoriguard™ may help with sensitive teeth if used long term.
- Chew sugar free gum if possible after meals and snacks.
- Water, milk, tea, cheese and nuts (if you are able to eat them) are healthy for your teeth as long as they have no added sugar.
- Try to limit the number of times in the day you have anything containing sugar. If you have been advised to have such things by a dietitian or doctor, rinse straight afterwards with an alcohol free fluoride mouthwash.



During combined treatment (radiotherapy and chemotherapy)

- Try to brush your teeth at least twice a day with a small headed **soft** toothbrush and gentle toothpaste. (Mint flavoured pastes may give a burning sensation).
- It is recommended that you brush your teeth before breakfast, then after breakfast use an alcohol free fluoride mouthwash.
- If your mouth is very sore use Difflam™ spray onto the join of the tooth and gum a few minutes before brushing.
- Using warm water rather than cold may help with sensitivity.
- Use Corsodyl dental gel (pea sized amount) with brush/finger and rub into gum/tooth margin once daily but not within 1 hour of using a fluoride rinse or toothpaste. Lunch time may be a convenient time to do this.

If during radiotherapy your mouth becomes very sore, it is recommended that you:

- Might need to swap to using an unflavoured toothpaste (oraNurse)
- Swap to using a soft toothbrush
- Increase the use of Corsodyl dental gel up to three times a day.

Corsodyl can be stopped once it is possible to brush again with fluoride toothpaste.

Keep trying each week after radiotherapy until you can use fluoride toothpaste.

- Rinse your mouth regularly with warm saline mouthwashes. (A teaspoon of salt mixed in a glass of boiled water at a temperature warm enough to be tolerated).
- During this uncomfortable time an oral gel (Gelclair™) can be used. It coats the inside of your mouth forming a thin protective layer over any sore areas.

If your mouth is very dry:

- Saliva substitutes may be useful if you are suffering from a dry mouth

Patient Information

- **If you have your own teeth** you can use one of the following products: Saliva Orthana/Oral Balance/Bio-extra as these are not acidic so will not damage the teeth.
- **If you have no teeth** you could also use Glandosane. This is acidic so it should not be used if you have teeth.

If you wear dentures:

- Do not sleep with dentures in. If your mouth is very dry, KY jelly or saliva substitutes can be used as a lubricant under the denture.
- If your mouth is too sore, remove your dentures until your mouth is less sensitive.
- To keep your dentures clean, brush them with soapy water and soak in Dentural™, following the recommended immersion times.

Further Information

See the Hospital's leaflets on Diet and Cancer Care:

- Diet and Cancer Care: Sore Mouth & Throat
- Diet and Cancer Care: Dry Mouth
- Diet and Cancer Care: Taste Changes

Macmillan Cancer Support

Tel: 0808 808 00 00

www.macmillan.org.uk

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