

Oral Care during Radiation Treatment

Head and Neck Cancer

Radiation treatment

Radiation is a necessary part of your treatment and recovery from cancer. However, it comes with side effects which we will help you manage. Some side effects will be noticed immediately and will resolve once radiation is complete. Some side effects will be long-term, permanent side effects. It is important to see your dentist regularly to help you maintain optimum oral health.

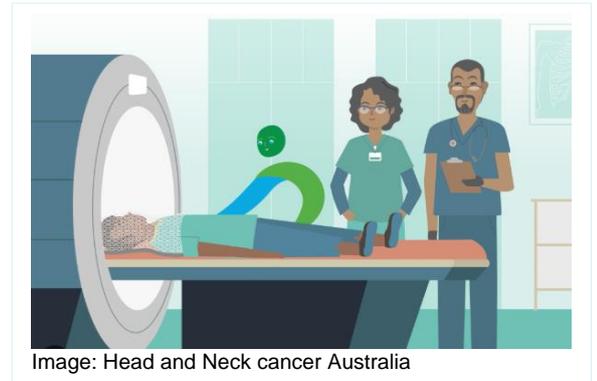


Image: Head and Neck cancer Australia

Short term side effects during radiation treatment

During your radiation treatment you may experience some or all of the following side effects:

- **Dry Mouth** (xerostomia)
- **Mucositis:** Inflammation of the lining of your mouth. This may start around the end of week two and resolve in the first couple of weeks after radiation.
- **Loss of taste:** This will improve in the weeks or months following radiation treatment.

Oral care during radiation treatment

It is important to have good oral hygiene during radiation treatment. To keep your teeth and mouth healthy, the following tips will help:

- Gently brush after meals and before bed. If your mouth is tender consider using a baby toothbrush and a soap-free toothpaste, such as Dentamed, Biotene or Oral 7 which are available at pharmacies.
- Continue to floss as usual unless your mouth becomes too tender.
- Rinse your mouth 3 to 4 times a day after meals with a bland mouth wash, more often if your mouth becomes tender.
 - You can make one at home by mixing 1 teaspoon of Bi-Carb soda +/- 1 teaspoon of salt in 1 litre of water.
 - Consider using Difflam mouth rinse in the first 2 to 3 weeks, until your mouth becomes tender, then continue with the Bi-Carb soda mouth wash.
- Keep mouth and lips moist with frequent sips of water and a lip moisturizer/balm such as pawpaw ointment.
- Do jaw opening exercises from day 1. This will help you retain good mouth opening in the future. Open as wide as you can and repeat 10 times. Do three sets of this through the day.
 - Your speech therapist will support you with these exercises.
- Remove dentures if they irritate your mouth.
- Avoid things that irritate your mouth:
 - spicy, dry acidic, abrasive foods
 - alcohol
 - tobacco

People who use this service have given feedback on this information.

- strong mouth rinse.

What else should you know?

- Talk to your doctor or nurse if your mouth becomes too tender. They can prescribe pain medication or an anaesthetic rinse to help you.

Your questions

If you are unsure about anything in this fact sheet, please write down questions for your care team:
