



A Teaching Affiliate
of Harvard Medical School

Taking Care of Your Mouth During Treatment

The Center for Breast Cancer
Mass General Cancer Center



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Mucositis

- What is mucositis?
 - Also known as **mouth sores**.
 - Cancer treatment can cause your gums, tongue, and the lining of your mouth to become red, swollen, and tender.
 - It can be a serious side effect of cancer treatment.



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Mucositis

- What are the symptoms of mucositis?
 - Mucositis may start with mild symptoms. Your mouth may feel sensitive or burn when you eat spicy, salty, or very cold or hot foods.
 - It is important to pay attention to symptoms when you first notice a change in your mouth, gums, or tongue.
 - If these symptoms are ignored, they can become very severe and even life-threatening.



Mucositis

- Why is it important to manage mucositis?
 - Managing mucositis is important because it affects your health and quality of life. Severe mucositis can delay your cancer treatment.
- If you have mucositis, it is hard to:
 - Eat and enjoy food, drink enough fluids, talk and communicate.
- Mucositis will be easier to manage if you:
 - See your dentist **before** treatment begins for a dental checkup and cleaning.
 - Eat well and drink plenty of liquids. Take care of your mouth every day. Look for any signs of mouth changes during treatment.



Symptoms of Mild and Moderate Mucositis

- Mild Mucositis
 - When mucositis begins, you may notice that your mouth:
 - Feels dry, looks red, burns and has mild pain, has little cracks on your lips or sores on your gums
- Moderate Mucositis
 - If not treated, mild mucositis can become worse. You can develop:
 - Open sores and blisters on your gums and lips, and in your mouth, pain when eating and drinking, pain when swallowing or talking



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Symptoms of Severe Mucositis

- Severe Mucositis
 - Severe mucositis is a serious problem. It can cause:
 - Severe mouth and throat pain
 - changes in how things taste
 - severe malnutrition because you cannot eat
 - dehydration because you cannot drink
 - bleeding mouth sores
 - infections that can be life-threatening



How Is Mucositis Treated?

- Usually mucositis will heal on its own. Performing good mouth care can help speed along healing.
- If mouth pain interferes with eating, drinking and swallowing, your care team may prescribe a numbing mouth rinse or an oral pain medication.



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How Can I Take Care of My Mouth?

- See Your Dentist
 - **Before you begin treatment, you should have a dental checkup, cleaning, and any other dental work you need.**
 - Do not have any dental work during your treatment unless your oncologist says that it is safe.
- Look at Your Mouth Every Day
 - Check your lips, tongue, gums, teeth, and the roof of your mouth.
 - Look for sores, open areas, white patches, pimples, or other changes in your mouth.
 - Report any changes or pain to your doctor or nurse.
 - Tell your doctor or nurse if your mouth begins to feel dry.



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How Can I Take Care of My Mouth?

- Brush Your Teeth

- Use a new soft toothbrush.
- Brush gently. You can damage your gums if you brush too hard.
- Brush after each meal and before you go to bed.
- Talk with your doctor or nurse if brushing your teeth hurts or causes a lot of bleeding.
- If your doctor tells you to stop brushing, you can still clean your teeth:
 - Use an oral swab or soft foam swab called a “toothette.”



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How Can I Take Care of My Mouth?

- Rinse Your Mouth

- Rinse your mouth several times a day to help keep your mouth clean and moist:
 - Every 2 to 3 hours during the day
 - After each meal
 - Before going to bed
- Do **not** use a mouthwash that contains alcohol. Alcohol can dry and irritate your mouth.



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How Can I Take Care of My Mouth?

- Recipes for homemade salt or baking soda rinses:
 - ½ teaspoon of salt in 8 ounces of water, or
 - 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 8 ounces of water, or
 - 1 teaspoon of salt plus 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 32 ounces (1 quart) of water.
 - Use throughout the day.
 - Make it fresh every day.



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How Can I Take Care of My Mouth?

- Floss Your Teeth
 - Floss after each meal and before bed, but be gentle!
 - Do not floss if it hurts or makes your gums bleed a lot.
 - Do not floss if your platelet count is low. Ask your doctor or nurse if you are not sure.



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How Can I Take Care of My Mouth?

- Keep Your Mouth Moist
 - Sip water or spray your mouth with water throughout the day.
 - Try to drink at least 8 glasses of fluid every day.
 - Suck on sugar-free candy or chew sugar-free gum.
 - Moisten your lips with plain lip balm. Use nonmedicated balm. Do **not** use balm with menthol.
 - Talk with your nurse or doctor about products that replace saliva.

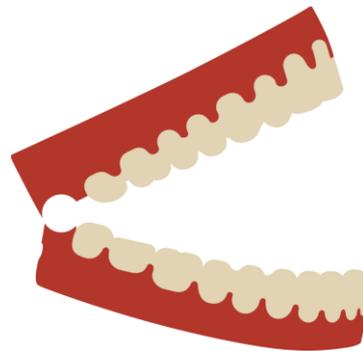


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How Can I Take Care of My Mouth?

- If You Wear Dentures:
 - Remove and clean your dentures after every meal and before bed.
 - Try to take breaks from wearing your dentures if they do not fit well. Do **not** wear your dentures if your mouth is irritated.
 - If you have mouth sores, you may need to eat soft foods without your dentures such as scrambled eggs, pureed or mashed foods, or liquid supplements.



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Take Care of Yourself

- Eat Well

- Eat high-protein, high-calorie meals to help your body heal.
- Take small bites, chew well, and drink liquids with your meals.
- Try to drink high-protein and high-calorie supplements.
- Drink fluids with no caffeine. Caffeine can make your mouth dry.
- Drink fluids such as water, low-acid juice (apple, grape, cranberry), broth, or soup.



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Take Care of Yourself

- If you are having trouble eating, a dietitian can help you with food choices. Ask to talk with a dietitian to discuss your diet.
- Log onto [massgeneral.org/cancer/nutrition](https://www.massgeneral.org/cancer/nutrition) for recipes and tips



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Help Protect Your Mouth

Tips to manage mucositis:

– **Do Not:**

- Drink alcohol or smoke
- Eat hot, sticky, or hard foods
- Eat foods or drink liquids that are high in acid such as tomatoes, oranges, grapefruits, and lemons
- Eat salty or spicy foods such as potato chips, hot sauces, curry dishes, salsa, and chili peppers
- Eat sharp, crunchy foods, such as granola, crackers, and potato and tortilla chips
- Suck on ice



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Talk to Your Care Team

Call your doctor or nurse if you have:

- Difficulty swallowing or eating
- Any new mouth sores or irritation
- Mouth pain

There are ways to manage your mouth pain. Tell your doctor or nurse about your pain.



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Contact Information

- Boston: 617-726-6500
- Waltham: 781-487-6100
- Patient Portal: patientgateway.org



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