

How to Care for Yourself **During** Head and Neck Radiation



EATING AND DRINKING

Your Registered Dietitian (RD) will help you with your eating and drinking.

- Choose high protein, high calorie foods and fluids.
 - Cheese, milk, meat, eggs, beans, Greek yogurt, puddings and ice cream.
- Choose soft or blended foods if you are having pain or trouble chewing or swallowing regular foods.
 - Cream soups, stews, casseroles, pasta, scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes.
 - Add sauces, gravies, oils and butter to moisten food.
- Avoid acidic foods and fluids like tomatoes and orange or grapefruit juice.
- Avoid dry, hard, crusty foods like toast, nuts, chips, and raw fruits and vegetables.
- Eat many small meals or snacks during the day when eating becomes more difficult.
- Add nutrition supplements or smoothies and milkshakes.
- Aim to drink 8 cups of non carbonated fluid daily (alcohol and caffeine free).
- Take small bites of food and sips of fluid often to keep your swallowing working.
- Taste change is normal. Ask for tips to help food taste better.

If you are having trouble eating or keeping your weight the same, tell your health care team right away.

SWALLOWING

Your Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) will help you with your swallowing during treatment. Swallowing Study and Diet Changes

- Continue to follow the Swallowing Safety guidelines (See “Before Radiation” sheet), *Swallowing Exercises*
- Continue with your exercises as best as you can through treatment.
- Do each exercise 5 to 10 times, 3 times a day.

Radiation Changes to Swallowing

Any time after the second week of treatment, you may find that swallowing is more difficult, due to side effects from radiation. These changes may continue until a few weeks after your treatment is complete.

- Your mouth or throat may feel like it is on fire when you swallow, and you may notice taste and smell changes.

- Your mouth may feel dry. Carry a bottle of water with you and sip often.

ORAL CARE

Your Dental Oncology team will help you with your mouth care during treatment.

Flossing

- Floss at least once daily if you are able.
- Use a topical anesthetic rinse prior to flossing if necessary.

Brushing

- Use a topical anesthetic rinse before brushing.
- Use a soft toothbrush with a fluoride toothpaste.
 - Gently brush after meals and before bed.
 - To clear your mouth use a moist gauze or foam swab soaked in mouth rinse.
 - If you cannot bear toothpaste use mouth rinse.

Rinsing (See “Mouth Rinse Bland Recipe” and “Use of Fluoride Trays”)

- Rinse, swish, and spit rinse several times after brushing, flossing, and eating.
 - Rinse every 1 to 2 hours while you are awake.
- Use fluoride trays daily or use a fluoridated tooth paste to prevent tooth decay.
- For thick mucus, use mouth rinse more often and sip water.

Oral Moisturizing

- Moisturize nasal passages through the night with a steam vapourizer in your room.
- Moisturize with mouth rinse and water-based lubricants more often.
 - Avoid petroleum jelly and glycerin products.

Lip Care

- Use water-soluble, wax-based, or oil-based lubricants often.
- *Do not apply petroleum Jelly.*

SKIN CARE

Your Radiation Treatment team will help you with your skin care during treatment.

Your skin may feel dry, tight, itchy, red and swollen.

- Continue to care for your skin as previously advised (See “Before Radiation” sheet).
- Use unscented water-based body lotions or creams 4 times per day.
- Do not peel off loose skin, and do not scratch or rub your skin.

Tell your Healthcare team if your skin opens or becomes wet or feels itchy.

- Continue to wash with mild soap and warm water. Pat the area dry.
- Your doctor *may* prescribe a cream for your skin.
- You may use normal saline compresses up to 4 times a day.

If you are having problems with your stoma, tell any member of your health care team.

TUBE FEEDING AND CARE

If you have a feeding tube, your Registered Dietitian (RD) and healthcare team will work with you to manage your tube feeding and care.

Tube Feeding

- Continue to flush your feeding tube with water 2 times per day (See “Before Radiation” sheet).
- If you are losing weight or eating and drinking less food and fluid by mouth your RD will continue to work with you to start and monitor tube feeds.
- Use water and nutrition supplements following your RD’s advice.

Tube Care

- Continue to keep the skin around your tube clean and dry.
- If there is no discharge, stop using a dressing.
- Check tube for redness, tenderness, a bad smell, or signs of infection.
 - Signs of infection: fiery red, swollen, discharge, pain, or fever.

Tell your health care team if...

- You think you have an infection or any issues with your tube.
- The bumper (rubber/plastic piece around the tube next to your skin) seems too tight or too loose.

Oral Care

MOUTH RINSE BLAND RECIPE



1 level teaspoon
(5 mL) of salt



1 level teaspoon
(5 mL) of baking soda



4 cups (1 L)
of water

HOW TO MAKE YOUR MOUTH RINSE

1. Mix 1 teaspoon of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of salt with 4 cups of water.
2. Put the mouthwash in a container with a lid.
3. The mouthwash should be kept at room temperature.
4. Discard at the end of each day and make a new batch.

HOW TO USE YOUR MOUTH RINSE

- Shake well before using.
- Rinse and gargle with one tablespoon (15 mL) and then spit out.
- Repeat 2 or 3 times at each use.
- Use mouthwash every 2 hours during the day.

DENTURE CARE

- Keep your dentures out as much as possible.
- Remove dentures, plates and prostheses before brushing.
- Brush and rinse dentures after meals and before bed.
- Soak dentures in cleansing solution for at least 8 hours.
- If you are on antifungal therapy, soak in anti-fungal solution.

DIRECTIONS FOR USE OF FLUORIDE TRAYS

1. Brush and floss before wearing trays.
2. Fill the grooves of the trays 1/3 full with gel.
3. Insert tray and spit out any excess gel.
4. Leave the tray in for 5 minutes.
 - Use at bedtime for longer lasting results.
 - Brush trays and air dry after each use.
 - **Do not** use hot water to clean trays (hot water will distort the tray).
 - **Do not** eat, drink or rinse for 30 minutes after tray use.

Inform your Dental team if you are no longer able to use your fluoride trays.

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT YOUR CARE:
