

**In addition to good dental hygiene, it is important to keep regular six-monthly check-ups with your dentist and hygienist.**

If you wear false teeth, please have these checked regularly to ensure that they continue to fit well.

When your treatment has been completed, your dentist will be able to undertake any routine work in your mouth. However, if you need to have any teeth removed, your dentist may decide to refer you to the hospital.

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**The following contact details provide access to dental services for those patients who are not currently registered with a dentist**

Lancaster, Morecambe and surrounding areas  
Tel: 01253 306378

Kendal, Barrow and surrounding areas  
Tel: 01228 602192

The Dental Triage Unit for East Lancashire  
Tel: 0845 5333230

Blackpool area  
Tel: 01253 655200

Preston area  
Tel: 01772 777397

NHS direct: Tel: 08454647



This leaflet has been produced by patients, carers and health professionals within the Lancashire and South Cumbria Cancer Network

Sometimes, the treatment that you are having, or the cancer itself, can make you prone to developing a sore mouth. Good mouth care helps to keep the mouth clean, moist and comfortable. It is especially important to take good care of your mouth during treatment, as poor mouth care may cause an increase in discomfort and difficulty in swallowing.

Radiotherapy and chemotherapy affect rapidly growing normal cells, such as those that make up the lining of your mouth and gut. This may result in inflammation of the lining of your mouth causing dryness and pain.

The severity of the soreness will depend on the area that is being treated and the number of treatments that you are given.

Common symptoms include redness, swelling, ulceration and bleeding inside the mouth. There can also be infection, particularly oral thrush or cold sores.

If mouth soreness occurs during your treatment, the radiotherapy/chemotherapy team will monitor your mouth condition regularly and advise you about care.

The following advice can help to keep your mouth comfortable and reduce the severity of the soreness.

#### **Before Treatment**

It is important that a dentist sees you before your treatment starts. This will ensure that your teeth and gums are in the best condition. Any unhealthy teeth may need to be removed. It is usual to be seen by a hospital dentist and a treatment plan devised.

#### **During Treatment**

- Clean your gums and/or teeth after every meal, supplement or sugary drink. Use a very soft (baby) toothbrush. This will prevent food remaining in your mouth which can encourage infection and dental decay.
- Use salt water (saline) mouthwashes every four hours during the day, using one teaspoon of salt in 500mls of warm water. This will keep your mouth clean between brushing. You may be advised to increase to hourly intervals whilst your mouth is sore.
- Your dentist may prescribe a high-fluoride toothpaste, such as Duraphat 5000.

- Check the inside of your mouth daily for thrush infection. This will look like yellow or white dots on your tongue or gums.  
Report any findings to a health care professional. Oral thrush medication may require the removal of false teeth.
- If your mouth becomes more sore, mouthwash such as Difflam or Gelclair may be useful and are often prescribed for you. It is available from your team whilst you are in hospital or from your doctor once you have been discharged.
- Always report any ongoing mouth soreness/pain as your team will be able to provide further advice, medications and mouthwashes to help.
- You may find that you produce less saliva as a result of your radiotherapy treatment and it may help to keep your mouth moist with regular sips of water, unless you have been advised otherwise.
- As your treatment progresses you may find it more comfortable to wear your dentures or dental plate at meal times only. Clean them carefully after every meal with unscented soap or a denture soak.
- Do not use Vaseline or lip balm on the lips during or immediately after treatment, as this can make the reaction to the radiotherapy side worse. E45 or aqueous cream can be used.
- Please check with your Key Worker before buying any over-the-counter mouth care products.

#### **After Treatment**

Following treatment, it is important that you keep your mouth and teeth clean and healthy. The chemotherapy/radiotherapy puts you at increased risk of dental decay if you do not take care of your teeth.

Radiotherapy weakens the bone (including the teeth) and the blood supply in the treatment area. In addition, saliva production, which helps to keep the mouth clean, is often reduced. Both of these factors can increase the risk of infection and decay inside your mouth. This can become particularly serious if the treated jawbone becomes infected.