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## Mouth Care in Haematology Patients

Cancer treatment is known to cause soreness and dryness in the mouth, along with an increased risk of mouth infections and dental problems. These problems could be mild and resolve within a few weeks after the cancer treatment is over.

In some cases, the symptoms may become severe and persist for longer, making it difficult for patients to eat food. Hence, it is essential to take proper mouth care and maintain oral hygiene while undergoing treatment for blood cancers.

### How to take care of your mouth during Haematology treatments?

- Visit your dentist for any necessary dental procedures before beginning cancer treatment
- Avoid mouthwashes containing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, glycerine, sodium bicarbonate, or lemon
- Clean your mouth three times a day
- Brush before bed using a soft toothbrush
- Replace your toothbrush once a month or if you have a mouth infection.
- Use fluoride toothpaste containing at least 1350 ppm of fluoride
- Floss once a day
- Examine your mouth daily to detect problems early
- Rinse your mouth with water after eating foods particularly those with a high sugar content
- If you wear dentures, rinse them after each meal and at bedtime. Do not wear your dentures at night to decrease the risk of infection.


## Change in taste

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Patients undergoing treatment for cancer may develop a change in taste. They may lose the sense of taste completely. Sometimes, the food you usually eat may taste unpleasant. These changes are temporary and typically return to normal within a few weeks after chemotherapy is over.

### Coping with Taste Changes

- Take frequent sips of water.
- Moisten your mouth at least once in 2 hours
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Sip fluids frequently using a straw
- Keep your mouth clean by following regular mouth care and oral hygiene practices
- Rinse your mouth with water or salt water (0.9% sodium chloride solution)
- Avoid smoking
- Eat at a place away from where the food was prepared, as the smell of other foods may interfere with the sense of taste
- Use wooden or plastic utensils if metal cutlery leaves an unpleasant taste in your mouth
- Avoid cooking in metallic pans
- Warm food is easier to eat
- Avoid spicy foods if you have soreness in your mouth
- Rinse your mouth with water after meals to reduce unpleasant tastes



## Dry Mouth

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The salivary glands produce saliva – the moisture in your mouth or spit. Conditions that affect the mouth and salivary glands can result in dry mouth (xerostomia). This can be a troubling side effect in haematology patients and can be caused by a number of factors such as:

- Medications: Chemotherapy, pain medications, anti-depressants
- In patients following allogeneic transplantation – they can develop dry mouth due to oral graft versus host disease (GvHD).
- Radiation therapy can cause dry mouth when the salivary glands have been exposed to radiation.
- Conditions such as dehydration, or fungal infection of the mouth (candidiasis)

## Tips to prevent Dryness in the mouth

- Maintain oral hygiene
- Ask your pharmacist, dentist, or our medical team about products designed to improve moisture and comfort in the mouth
- Choose products without sodium lauryl sulphate and alcohol
- Keep your tongue clean to prevent cracking
- Avoid sugary food and drinks such as cola, sports drinks, biscuits, sweets, citrus fruit juices, and cakes
- Avoid alcohol, caffeinated beverages, and cigarettes
- Try to drink 2 litres of water a day
- Carry a bottle of water with you when you go out and take frequent sips of water
- Suck on sugar-free, hard-boiled sweets to stimulate saliva production
- Suck on pieces of ice to moisten the oral cavity
- Drink water and sugar-free juices at mealtimes
- Avoid drinks or foods with acidic contents such as citrus juices
- Drink milk, yoghurt, and buttermilk to retain moisture in the mouth
- Use petroleum jelly or lip balm to keep the lips moist
- Rinse your dentures after each meal and clean them at bedtime
- Apply saliva replacement gel on the inner side of your dentures if they are difficult to wear

## Mucositis

Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy target the rapidly dividing cells and destroy them. However, these treatments can also affect the body's normal cells, including cells lining your mouth called the mucosa.

During treatment, the mucosa may become thin due to the inability to regenerate or repair itself. It can leave your mouth vulnerable to sores, ulcers, or inflammation that can lead to oral mucositis. If the mucositis is severe, you may require hospital admission.

The common symptoms of oral mucositis include:

- Ulcers in the mouth, especially on the tongue and lips
- Painful sores that interfere with eating, drinking, and talking
- Foul smelling breath
- Reduced sense of taste
- Dryness in the mouth

## Tips to relieve Mucositis

- Ask our nurses about mucosal protectors which can be applied to ulcers.
- Avoid foods that cause irritation such as citrus fruits, pickles, tomatoes, spicy or salty foods
- Avoid textured foods like toast and raw vegetables
- Cook foods by making a purée
- Cut fruits and vegetables into smaller pieces before eating or cooking
- Avoid very warm or hot foods and drinks
- Drink at least 2 litres of fluids a day to keep the oral cavity moist and loosen the thick saliva.
- Use a straw for drinking water
- Carry a water bottle with you while going out
- Take sips of water regularly
- Avoid drinks with caffeine including coffee and tea
- Dilute fruit juices
- Avoid citrus fruit juices including orange, and grapefruit
- Avoid smoking and alcohol intake
- Suck on small pieces of ice
- Try using painkillers such as paracetamol
- If dentures feel uncomfortable or challenging to keep in place, leave them out for more extended periods. Changes in your gum may result in the dentures not fitting well.

## Oral thrush

This is a type of fungal infection affecting the mouth. It is sometimes called oral candidiasis as it usually occurs due to the yeast or fungi known as Candida.

The common symptoms of oral thrush include:

- The appearance of white patches in the mouth that leaves behind red sores which may bleed when scraped
- Loss of taste
- Unpleasant taste in the mouth
- Cracks at the corners of the lips
- Redness in the mouth and throat
- Pain and burning sensation in the mouth that can make eating and drinking difficult

You can speak to our medical team if you experience these symptoms. In severe cases, oral thrush may become worse and spread to other parts of your body.

### Treatment of oral thrush

Oral thrush can be treated using anti-fungal medications. It is important to finish the course of these medicines even after the symptoms have improved.

Mouthwashes and dental gels containing Chlorhexidine Gluconate possess anti-fungal properties. However, these products may interfere with the action of anti-fungal medicines you are using. Hence, you may be asked to not use mouth care products and anti-fungal drugs at the same time. It is advisable to leave a gap of at least 30 minutes between anti-fungal medications and your mouthwashes or dental gels.

### Prevention of Oral Thrush

- Avoid sugary foods or drinks as they can promote fungal growth
- Rinse your mouth thoroughly with water after each meal
- Clean your teeth at least three times a day
- Brush your teeth before bedtime to ensure your mouth is clean throughout the night
- Use a soft toothbrush that is designed for sensitive teeth to ensure optimum mouth care
- Choose fluoride toothpaste containing a minimum of 1350 ppm fluoride
- Remove the dentures every night
- Clean dentures with soap and water or paste before soaking them in a solution of a denture-cleaning tablet and water
- Clean your tongue, gums, and the inside of the mouth with a soft brush twice a day even if you don't have natural teeth and wear dentures
- If you have diabetes, monitor your blood glucose levels regularly

## Contact our doctor immediately if you have:

- Fever
- Severe pain or difficulty in eating or drinking
- Bleeding from the mouth
- Difficulty in swallowing or opening your mouth
- Coughing a lot when eating and drinking
- White spots in the mouth

*Disclaimer:*

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