

# Sore and dry mouths

*Many people receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy may experience a wide variety of mouth problems: infections, altered taste, sore and dry mouths. We have a detailed patient information sheet on these specific problems but below are some general notes for coping with a sore and dry mouth.*

## Before treatment

- Visit your dentist for a check up
- Have any necessary dental treatment done
- Ask for advice about techniques to help prevent mouth and throat problems connected with cancer treatment
- Avoid food and drinks that are very warm or hot. Cold food and drinks can be a soothing option for a sore mouth
- Try to drink three litres of fluids per day
- Diluting fruit juices can make them more palatable
- Avoid irritating foods eg citrus fruits, citrus juices, tomatoes, pickles, spicy and salty foods which may sting the mouth
- Try to avoid tobacco and alcohol
- It can be easier to drink fluids through a straw
- Sucking on hard boiled sweets eg lemon drops, glycerine or gelatine cubes, herb lozenges or chewing gum can help with saliva stimulation
- GPs can prescribe artificial saliva sprays or gels, mouthwashes or lozenges to suck, if you think they will help
- Avoid textured food like toast or raw vegetables as they can scrape at sore skin
- Keep lips moist with lip balm, cocoa butter or petroleum jelly

## Oral hygiene

- Massage gums gently
- Clean teeth with a soft toothbrush (a child's toothbrush is ideal)
- Use a non-irritating toothpaste or a paste of baking soda and water
- Try using an antiseptic toothbrush cleaner
- Rinse mouth frequently with water/baking soda and water solution/Difflam™ oral rinse (an anaesthetising mouthwash). Avoid commercial mouthwashes containing salt or alcohol
- Remove dentures and bridges when sleeping and clean them after every meal

## Points to remember

- Using analgesia (pain killers) prior to meals can help if experiencing a sore mouth
- Cook foods to a puree or cut them into small pieces

## Suggested foods for dry or sore mouths

Please note that not all foods will be suitable for people with a low white cell count.



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## Breakfast

- Porridge/Ready brek®
- Breakfast cereals soaked until soft in milk eg Rice Krispies®, cornflakes

## Main meals

- Eggs – poached, boiled, scrambled, fried (avoid raw eggs as they may contain infection-causing organisms)
- Soup
- Add sauces and gravies to meat and fish
- Minced meat
- Creamed chicken or ham
- Soft poached or flaked fish in sauce
- Cheese dishes – macaroni cheese/cauliflower cheese/cottage/cream cheese
- Jacket potato with grated cheese/cream cheese/sour cream
- Mashed potato
- Tinned spaghetti/baked beans/ravioli
- Pasta with bolognese/tomato/cheese/cream sauce
- Quiche

### Desserts

- Milk puddings, blancmange
- Egg custard, tinned custard
- Soft fruits, tinned or stewed fruit, fruit puree
- Mousse
- Ice cream
- Fruit fool
- Crème caramel
- Marshmallows
- Watermelon
- Pineapple chunks
- Ice lollies
- Frozen yoghurts

### Drinks

- Cool milky drinks
- Try adding crushed ice to drinks
- Diluted fruit juices
- High protein drinks eg Build-up® drinks

### Problems to look out for

- Mouth sores
- Tender gums
- Sore throat
- Bleeding gums
- Raised temperature

If you have any concerns regarding a sore or dry mouth discuss them with your hospital doctor or GP. Many specialist oncology units have links with dental hospitals, where specialists with a particular interest and expertise in the management of these problems are available and willing to advise. Always notify your medical team of any changes that you're experiencing.

### Further reading

If you would like a copy of the Lymphoma Association information sheet 'Oral problems associated with chemotherapy and radiotherapy', please call the Helpline.

This patient information sheet was medically reviewed by Micaela Plucinski, Lymphoma Association Clinical Nurse Specialist, University College London Hospitals in May 2007.