

Mouth Sores/Stomatitis

Side Effects – Symptoms & Solutions

What is stomatitis?

Some chemotherapies can cause sores, dryness, irritation, and bleeding in the mouth and throat, a condition known as stomatitis (stoe-muh-TIE-tus). Since many germs live in the mouth, these sores can become infected, which is a serious side effect for some patients with cancer. Therefore, every precaution should be taken against stomatitis.

How can I protect my mouth, gums, and throat?

- Talk to your doctor about going to the dentist at least a few weeks before starting chemotherapy. Inform the dentist of your cancer diagnosis and treatment, and ask for the following:
 - A check-up and cleaning, if necessary
 - A demonstration of the best way to brush and floss during chemotherapy
 - A recommendation for a special toothbrush or toothpaste if your gums are very sensitive
- After every meal and at bedtime, gently brush your teeth and gums with a soft toothbrush and rinse with warm salt water and baking soda (1/2 tsp of salt + 1/2 tsp baking soda in 8 oz of water); rinse your toothbrush well and store it in a dry place
- Avoid mouthwashes containing alcohol, but ask your doctor or nurse for suggestions for medicated or mild mouthwashes, such as those containing baking soda
- Eat well after starting chemotherapy; this lowers your risk for stomatitis

What can I do for painful mouths sores?

- Ask your doctor for medication or for remedies you can put directly on the sore.
- Eat foods cold or at room temperature.
- Eat soft, soothing food, such as mashed potatoes, scrambled eggs, macaroni and cheese, ice cream, milkshakes, soft fruit, baby food, etc; you can also puree cooked foods in a blender.
- Avoid the following:
 - Acidic or irritating juices and foods, such as tomato and citrus
 - Spicy or salty foods
 - Rough or coarse foods, such as raw vegetables, granola, popcorn, or toast

What can I do for mouth dryness?¹

- Ask your doctor if the following are appropriate for you: using an artificial saliva product: sucking on ice chips, popsicles, or sugarless hard candy; or chewing sugarless gum.
- Carry a water bottle; drink plenty or sip often.
- Eat soft or pureed foods, and moisten dry food with butter, margarine, gravy, sauce, or broth.
- For dry lips, use lip balm or petroleum jelly.

The information contained herein is not comprehensive and is intended only as a guide.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you develop a mouth sore or about further ways you can avoid or treat mouth, gum, and throat problems.

Other suggestions from your healthcare providers:

What you can do about mouth and throat problems.

It is not uncommon for patients with cancer to experience problems in the mouth and throat as a result of chemotherapy or radiation therapy. These areas, which are among the most sensitive in the body, may become dry or sore as a result of treatment. Because eating well and drinking fluids play a vital role in the healing process, it is especially important to take good care of your mouth and throat. Although the following information can help you cope with these problems, be sure to tell your doctor about any side effects that may occur in these or any area of your body.

Sore throat

If you develop a sore throat, try to adjust your eating habits to make swallowing easier.

- Use butter, margarine, gravy sauces or broth on foods.
- Soften and moisten food by dunking it in a beverage.
- Make foods easier to swallow by using a blender.
- Using a straw may make swallowing more comfortable.
- Eat soft foods such as mashed potatoes, yogurt, eggs (scrambled, poached or soft-boiled), egg custards, ricotta cheese, milk shakes, creamy cereals, macaroni and cheese.
- Consider eating soft, cold foods, such as ice cream, pudding, popsicles, watermelon, baby food, grapes or gelatin. It is okay to eat foods containing sugar like these at mealtime along with other foods. If eaten in between meals, however they can cause tooth decay.

Mouth sores (stomatitis)

If you develop sores inside your mouth, the following guidelines should help you feel better.

- Avoid foods and juices that are highly acidic, such as those containing tomatoes, oranges and grapefruits. Apricot or pear nectar, squash, beans and peas will not sting your mouth.
- Try not to use too many spices, especially salt, because they may cause a burning sensation in your mouth.
- Avoid cigarettes and alcohol.
- Keep your mouth and gums clean to help prevent infection (see below for tips on taking care of your mouth).
- If your mouth or throat becomes too sore, ask your doctor about medications that may help lessen the discomfort.

How to take care of your mouth

Here are some good ways to help keep your mouth healthy while you are receiving anti cancer treatment.

- Use a soft bristle toothbrush. Be careful not to damage the soft tissue of the mouth by brushing too hard.
- Avoid commercial mouthwashes. These often contain a lot of salt or alcohol which can irritate your mouth. May use products like Biotene toothpaste and rinse.
- Make your own non irritating mouthwash: Mix 1 teaspoon of baking soda with 1 cup of warm water. Rinse with this solution in your mouth for about 1 minute.
- Use lip balm to keep your lips moist.
- Consult your dentist about using a fluoride gel to help prevent severe tooth decay that can develop when the flow of saliva is reduced.

Directions, Notes...
