

# Wolfville Dentistry

## *Oral Health Care & Cancer Treatment*

Chemotherapy and Radiation can cause negative effects on your mouth. Thankfully these side effects are not normally permanent, and usually subside within 6-8 weeks post-treatment. The following tips are intended to help you manage some of these effects.

### *Before your Treatment...*

- The healthier your mouth is BEFORE your cancer treatment the better. Research shows that people with good oral hygiene habits have less severe oral effects during cancer treatment.
- Having a professional cleaning at your dental office before your treatment begins is beneficial. This also gives your dental team a chance to look for any issues that could cause problems during treatment (ie: ill-fitting dentures, broken teeth or fillings, gum infections etc).

### *During your Treatment...*

*•sucking on ice chips for 30 minutes prior to, and during the administration of chemo can reduce the severity of mouth sores.*

- Dry mouth is a common side effect of cancer treatments. **This puts you at a higher risk of cavities.** Avoid high sugary foods/drinks and use a toothpaste with fluoride.
- If you were not a regular flosser before your treatment, do not start during your chemo. Your tissues will be too irritated and you could cause damage to them. Do not use toothpicks during this time.
- Avoid scratchy, abrasive, spicy foods. Stick to soft/smooth foods with high caloric value such as smoothies, protein shakes, mashed vegetables and fruits etc.
- If you find that toothpaste is difficult to use (it may feel/taste too strong for your tissues), making a paste with baking soda and water or using water alone are alternatives.
- If you find it difficult to brush your teeth during your treatment, try wiping the teeth with a soft, wet cloth. Focus on the gumline which is where the plaque will accumulate.
- Keep your dentures clean! Dirty dentures can introduce bacterial and fungal infections into the mouth.

### *Some other tips and considerations:*

- Products that contain saliva substitutes are available at the drug/health food store such as *Biotene* rinses and toothpastes.
- Swishing your mouth with **coconut oil** has been shown to provide a soothing lubrication of sore, irritated tissues. This can be done multiple times a day.
- **Aloe gel** is available at most health food stores; swish, gargle, and swallow to coat the tissue of the mouth and lining the GI tract.
- **Vitamin E** is useful for sores on lips and / or corners of mouth
- **Colgate Orabase** is soothing for canker sores (available at the drug store)
- **Acidophilus** is useful for the treatment and prevention of fungal infections. Available in health food stores usually in capsule form. Open capsule and dissolve in water. Gargle, swish, and swallow 2 times per day.
- Using a **homemade mouth rinse** after each mealtime is beneficial. Mix 2 cups warm water + 1/2 teaspoon salt + 1/4 teaspoon baking soda.

### *Prescriptions are available from your dentist/doctor for oral side effects:*

- **“TripleMix or Magic Mouthrinse”** is a rinse that contains an antihistamine, an antacid, and a numbing gel which work to sooth and heal mouth sores.
- **Nystatin** is an antifungal crème used on sore lips and corners of mouth. It is also available as a mouth rinse for fungal infections in the mouth (ie: under dentures).
- **Chlorhexidine** is a antibacterial mouth rinse. It can cause brown staining of the teeth which can be removed by a professional cleaning.



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