

# Oncology Symptom: Mouth Sores

## What causes mouth sores?

- Mouth sores are caused by irritation to the lining of the mouth and throat.
- This irritation can be caused by chemotherapy or by radiation to the head or neck.

## How will I know if I have mouth sores?

If you have mouth sores, you may notice 1 or more of the following signs in your mouth or throat:

- ✓ Dryness
- ✓ Soreness
- ✓ Pain
- ✓ Redness
- ✓ White patches
- ✓ Bleeding

## How long do mouth sores last?

- Mouth sores may start 5 to 7 days after your chemotherapy or radiation treatment.
- Mouth sores can last up to 2 weeks until your mouth and throat heals.

## What should I do if I get mouth sores?

- While you are on chemotherapy or radiation, you should look inside your mouth every day to check for any dryness, soreness, pain, redness, white patches or bleeding.
- You should **tell your doctor or nurse right away** about any of these problems:
  - ✓ You notice any of the signs listed above.
  - ✓ You are not able to eat or drink for more than 1 day.
  - ✓ You have mouth bleeding that will not stop.
  - ✓ You see white patches in your mouth.
  - ✓ You have a fever of 100.5°F or higher.

## What can I do to decrease mouth soreness?

- Brush your teeth or dentures when you wake up in the morning, after meals, and before bedtime.
- Use a soft toothbrush.
- If a toothbrush is painful or causes your gums to bleed, use a soft sponge or swab to brush your teeth.
- Use tooth gel instead of paste because it is less harsh.
- Floss between your teeth every day with unwaxed dental floss. Stop flossing if your gums start bleeding.
- Keep dentures out of your mouth between meals.
- Rinse your mouth every 1-2 hours during the day with ¼ teaspoon salt **OR** ¼ teaspoon baking soda mixed in 1 cup tap water.
- Do not rinse your mouth with store-bought mouthwash because it is too harsh.
- Keep your lips moist with petroleum jelly or lip balm.
- Drink 2 to 3 quarts of fluid every day.
- Stay away from things that irritate your mouth such as:
  - ✓ alcoholic drinks (including beer and wine)
  - ✓ tobacco
  - ✓ warm foods
  - ✓ spicy foods
  - ✓ food that are hard to chew (for example, pretzels)
  - ✓ citrus fruits
- If you have a very dry mouth, you can try 1 of the things listed below:
  - ✓ cracked ice cubes
  - ✓ sugarless gum
  - ✓ mints
- Don't forget to **tell your doctor or nurse right away** if:
  - ✓ You are not able to eat or drink for more than 1 day.
  - ✓ You have mouth bleeding that will not stop.
  - ✓ You see white patches in your mouth.
  - ✓ You have a fever of 100.5°F or higher.