

What To Do

When Your Mouth or Throat Hurts



“It was hard for me to eat and swallow. So I began to eat softer foods and check my mouth each day. I also took pain medicine from my doctor.”

Take good care of your mouth.

Before treatment:

- Visit a dentist at least 2 weeks before your first treatment. Tell the dentist that you will be having radiation therapy.

During treatment:

- Check inside your mouth every day and look for any changes.
- Brush your teeth, gums, and tongue gently with a soft, clean toothbrush.
- Brush after each meal and before bedtime.
- Sip water or suck on ice chips to keep your mouth and throat wet.

Every 1 to 2 hours during the day:

- Rinse your mouth with a mixture of 1 cup warm water, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda, and $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt. Swish the mixture around in your mouth, and then spit it out.
- Ask your doctor or nurse to write down any other mouth rinses that you should use.



Tell your doctor or nurse if you notice any changes in your mouth or throat.

Tips to make eating more comfortable:

This can help:

- Mash food or cut it into small pieces.
- Add gravy or broth to make other foods wet and soft.
- Drink through a straw if that helps.
- Eat foods warm—not too hot.
- Eat soft foods, such as cooked cereals, macaroni, mashed potatoes, scrambled eggs, and yogurt.
- Use a blender to make milkshakes or blend your food.

Stay away from these:

- **Don't** drink alcohol or sour juices.
- **Don't** eat foods that are spicy, salty, or have a lot of sugar. Hard, sharp foods such as chips can also make your mouth hurt.
- **Don't** use tobacco—no cigarettes, pipes, cigars, or chewing tobacco.

Tips to help with pain or burning in your throat:

- Sit upright and bend your head forward a little when you are eating or drinking.
- Sit or stand up for at least 30 minutes after eating.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you have trouble swallowing, feel like you are choking, or cough while you are eating or drinking.



Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. What mouth or throat problems should I call you about?
2. Can you show me how to make a mouth rinse?
3. What medicine can I take to help stop the pain?

Free Services To Learn More

National Cancer Institute Cancer Information Service

Phone: 1-800-422-6237
(1-800-4-CANCER)

TTY: 1-800-332-8615

Online: www.cancer.gov

Chat Online: www.cancer.gov/help



NATIONAL
CANCER
INSTITUTE

NIH Publication No. 10-6109
Reprinted April 2010

