

# How to Care for Yourself **During** Head and Neck Radiation



## EATING AND DRINKING

*Your Registered Dietitian (RD) will help you with your eating and drinking.*

- Choose high protein, high calorie foods and fluids.
  - Cheese, milk, meat, eggs, beans, Greek yogurt, puddings and ice cream.
- Choose soft or blended foods if you are having pain or trouble chewing or swallowing regular foods.
  - Cream soups, stews, casseroles, pasta, scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes.
  - Add sauces, gravies, oils and butter to moisten food.
- Avoid acidic foods and fluids like tomatoes and orange or grapefruit juice.
- Avoid dry, hard, crusty foods like toast, nuts, chips, and raw fruits and vegetables.
- Eat many small meals or snacks during the day when eating becomes more difficult.
- Add nutrition supplements or smoothies and milkshakes.
- Aim to drink 8 cups of non carbonated fluid daily (alcohol and caffeine free).
- Take small bites of food and sips of fluid often to keep your swallowing working.
- Taste change is normal. Ask for tips to help food taste better.

*If you are having trouble eating or keeping your weight the same, tell your health care team right away.*

## SWALLOWING

*Your Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) will help you with your swallowing during treatment. Swallowing Study and Diet Changes*

- Continue to follow the Swallowing Safety guidelines (See “Before Radiation” sheet), *Swallowing Exercises*
- Continue with your exercises as best as you can through treatment.
- Do each exercise 5 to 10 times, 3 times a day.

*Radiation Changes to Swallowing*

Any time after the second week of treatment, you may find that swallowing is more difficult, due to side effects from radiation. These changes may continue until a few weeks after your treatment is complete.

- Your mouth or throat may feel like it is on fire when you swallow, and you may notice taste and smell changes.
- Your mouth may feel dry. Carry a bottle of water with you and sip often.

## ORAL CARE

*Your Dental Oncology team will help you with your mouth care during treatment.*

*Flossing*

- Floss at least once daily if you are able.
- Use a topical anesthetic rinse prior to flossing if necessary.

*Brushing*

- Use a topical anesthetic rinse before brushing.
- Use a soft toothbrush with a fluoride toothpaste.
  - Gently brush after meals and before bed.
  - To clear your mouth use a moist gauze or foam swab soaked in mouth rinse.
  - If you cannot bear toothpaste use mouth rinse.

*Rinsing (See “Mouth Rinse Bland Recipe” and “Use of Fluoride Trays”)*

- Rinse, swish, and spit rinse several times after brushing, flossing, and eating.
  - Rinse every 1 to 2 hours while you are awake.
- Use fluoride trays daily or use a fluoridated tooth paste to prevent tooth decay.
- For thick mucus, use mouth rinse more often and sip water.

*Oral Moisturizing*

- Moisturize nasal passages through the night with a steam vapourizer in your room.
- Moisturize with mouth rinse and water-based lubricants more often.
  - Avoid petroleum jelly and glycerin products.

*Lip Care*

- Use water-soluble, wax-based, or oil-based lubricants often.
- *Do not apply petroleum Jelly.*

## SKIN CARE

*Your Radiation Treatment team will help you with your skin care during treatment.*

*Your skin may feel dry, tight, itchy, red and swollen.*

- Continue to care for your skin as previously advised (See “Before Radiation” sheet).
- Use unscented water-based body lotions or creams 4 times per day.
- Do not peel off loose skin, and do not scratch or rub your skin.

*Tell your Healthcare team if your skin opens or becomes wet or feels itchy.*

- Continue to wash with mild soap and warm water. Pat the area dry.
- Your doctor *may* prescribe a cream for your skin.
- You may use normal saline compresses up to 4 times a day.

*If you are having problems with your stoma, tell any member of your health care team.*

## TUBE FEEDING AND CARE

*If you have a feeding tube, your Registered Dietitian (RD) and healthcare team will work with you to manage your tube feeding and care.*

*Tube Feeding*

- Continue to flush your feeding tube with water 2 times per day (See “Before Radiation” sheet).
- If you are losing weight or eating and drinking less food and fluid by mouth your RD will continue to work with you to start and monitor tube feeds.
- Use water and nutrition supplements following your RD’s advice.

*Tube Care*

- Continue to keep the skin around your tube clean and dry.
- If there is no discharge, stop using a dressing.
- Check tube for redness, tenderness, a bad smell, or signs of infection.
  - Signs of infection: fiery red, swollen, discharge, pain, or fever.

*Tell your health care team if...*

- You think you have an infection or any issues with your tube.
- The bumper (rubber/plastic piece around the tube next to your skin) seems too tight or too loose.

# Oral Care

## MOUTH RINSE BLAND RECIPE



1 level teaspoon  
(5 mL) of salt



1 level teaspoon  
(5 mL) of baking soda



4 cups (1 L)  
of water

### HOW TO MAKE YOUR MOUTH RINSE

1. Mix 1 teaspoon of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of salt with 4 cups of water.
2. Put the mouthwash in a container with a lid.
3. The mouthwash should be kept at room temperature.
4. Discard at the end of each day and make a new batch.

### HOW TO USE YOUR MOUTH RINSE

- Shake well before using.
- Rinse and gargle with one tablespoon (15 mL) and then spit out.
- Repeat 2 or 3 times at each use.
- Use mouthwash every 2 hours during the day.

### DENTURE CARE

- Keep your dentures out as much as possible.
- Remove dentures, plates and prostheses before brushing.
- Brush and rinse dentures after meals and before bed.
- Soak dentures in cleansing solution for at least 8 hours.
- If you are on antifungal therapy, soak in anti-fungal solution.

### DIRECTIONS FOR USE OF FLUORIDE TRAYS

1. Brush and floss before wearing trays.
2. Fill the grooves of the trays 1/3 full with gel.
3. Insert tray and spit out any excess gel.
4. Leave the tray in for 5 minutes.
  - Use at bedtime for longer lasting results.
  - Brush trays and air dry after each use.
  - **Do not** use hot water to clean trays (hot water will distort the tray).
  - **Do not** eat, drink or rinse for 30 minutes after tray use.

*Inform your Dental team if you are no longer able to use your fluoride trays.*

### IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT YOUR CARE:

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