

# How to Care for Yourself **Before** Head and Neck Radiation Begins



## EATING AND DRINKING

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

- Eat a balanced diet with foods from all food groups in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.
- Choose soft or blended foods if you are having pain or trouble chewing or swallowing regular foods.
- Aim to drink 8 cups of non carbonated fluid every day (alcohol free).
- Keep your body weight the same.
- If you are underweight, try to gain some weight.

*Your Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) may help you with your swallowing before treatment.*

### *Swallowing Study and Diet Changes*

- Before treatment begins, you may be assessed by a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) to get a better idea of how you are swallowing.
- To keep you swallowing safely during treatment some of your food and liquid may be changed.

### *Swallowing Exercises*

- Start your exercises right away.
- Do each exercise 5 to 10 times, 3 times a day.

### *Signs of Swallowing Problems*

- Coughing, throat-clearing, or a wet or gurgly during meals
- Food feeling stuck in your throat, or a need to wash food down with fluid.
- Needing to make an effort to swallow, or needing more time to eat.
- Trouble chewing food.
- Liquid coming out of your mouth or nose.

### *Swallowing Safety*

- Sit up straight when eating or drinking and remain sitting up for 30 minutes afterwards.
- Use teaspoons and take small sips of liquids.
- Alternate between small bites of food with small sips of liquids.
- Try not to talk while chewing or swallowing.
- Check that your mouth and cheeks are free from food after eating.
- You may be given other swallowing techniques to help you swallow as best you can.

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

### *Flossing*

- Floss at least once daily with waxed floss.

### *Brushing*

- Use a soft toothbrush.
  - Brush before bed.
  - Gently brush tongue.
  - Brush within 30 minutes of eating.

### *Rinsing (See "Mouth Rinse Bland Recipe")*

- Rinse, swish and spit rinse several times after brushing or flossing.
  - Ensure medicated rinses are done 20 minutes apart.

### *Oral Moisturizing*

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

### *Lip Care*

- Use water-soluble, wax-based, or oil-based lubricants.
- Apply after cleaning, at bedtime and as needed.
- **Do not** apply petroleum Jelly.

*Helpful Skin-care Guidelines from Your Radiation Treatment team.*

### *Moisturize your skin*

- Wash with mild unscented soap.
- Bath with warm water, rinse well, and pat dry with a clean soft towel.
- Wear loose-fitting and breathable clothing, such as cotton.

### *Moisturize your skin*

- Use water-based body lotions or creams to moisturize the skin as needed.
- **Do not** use aftershave or perfume products on your skin.
- Avoid products that contain petroleum Jelly.

### *Protect your skin*

- Protect your skin from direct sunlight and wind.
- Wear a brimmed hat and protective clothing.
- Avoid extreme hot or cold temperatures.
- **Do not** use ice packs or heating pads, and **do not** soak in a hot tub.
- Use an electric shaver only.

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

- Flush your tube with 60mL (1 syringe) of lukewarm tap water 2 times a day (morning and night).
- Clean the skin around your tube daily and keep it dry.
  1. Clean the skin with a cotton swab dipped in water or gentle soap and water.
  2. Wipe away any crusting or drainage.
  3. Gently pat dry with a soft, clean towel or cotton ball.
  4. If there is a leak, cover skin with a gauze bandage.
- Cover tube while showering; no baths, hot tubs or pools.
- **Do not** use rubbing alcohol, peroxide, antibacterial lotions or gels on the skin around your tube.

## SKIN CARE

## TUBE FEEDING AND CARE

# 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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