

# How to Care for Yourself During Head and Neck Radiation



## EATING AND DRINKING

*Your Dietician will work with you to help you with your eating and drinking*

- Choose high protein, high calorie foods and liquids
  - 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 and mashed potatoes
  - Add sauces, gravies, oils or butter to moisten food
- Avoid acidic food and drinks like tomatoes, and orange or grapefruit juice
- Avoid dry, hard, crusty foods like toast, nuts, chips, and raw fruit and vegetables
- Eat many small meals or snacks during the day if eating becomes more difficult
- Take nutritional supplements and/or have smoothies or milkshakes
- Aim to drink 8 cups water daily (avoid alcohol and caffeine)
- Take small bites of food and sip liquids 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 healthcare team right away*

## SWALLOWING

*Your Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) 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 5-10 times, 3 times a day or advised by your SLT

*Radiation Changes to Swallowing*

Any time after the 2nd week of radiation treatment you may find your swallowing is more difficult due to side effects from radiation. These changes may continue and sometimes can worsen until a few weeks after your treatment is complete, but you will be supported by your SLT and Oncology team

- Your mouth/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
- An anaesthetic rinse may be prescribed for you to use prior to flossing if necessary

*Brushing*

- An anaesthetic rinse may be prescribed for you to use prior to brushing your teeth if necessary
- Use a soft toothbrush with a fluoride toothpaste
  - To clear your mouth, use a clean moist gauze or foam swab soaked in mouth rinse
  - If you cannot bear toothpaste, use bread soda mouth rinse

*Rinsing (see “Mouth Rinse Recipe” and “Use of Fluoride Trays” on back)*

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

*Oral Moisturizing*

- Moisturising using steaming or a nebuliser if you have been given one as part of your care
- Moisturize with mouth rinse and water based lubricants more often
  - Avoid vaseline jelly and glycerin products

*Lip Care*

- Use water soluble, wax based or oil based lubricants often
- Do not apply vaseline 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 unperfumed water based body lotions or creams 4 times per day as advised by your Oncology team
- Do not peel off loose skin, scratch or rub your skin

*Tell your Healthcare team if your skin opens or becomes wet or feels itchy as soon as this occurs*

- Continue to wash with mild soap and warm water. Pat the area dry
- Your oncology team will advise you on creams or dressings if your skin gets very dry, red or breaks
- 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 healthcare team right away*

## TUBE FEEDING AND CARE

*If you have a feeding tube, your Dietitian 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 liquid by mouth, your RD will continue to work with you to start and monitor tube feeds
- Use water and nutritional supplements following your Dietician’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 skin around tube for signs of redness, tenderness, bad smell and for signs of infection
  - Signs of infection: fiery red skin colour, swelling, discharge, pain or fever

*Tell your healthcare right away team if...*

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

# 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 level teaspoon (5 ml) of salt
- Put the mouthwash in a container with a lid
- The mouthwash should be kept at room temperature
- Discard any remaining mouth rinse 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 if they are causing pain
- Remove dentures, plates and prostheses before brushing
- Gently brush and rinse dentures after meals and before bed. Avoid vigorous scrubbing
- Soak dentures in cleansing solution for at least 8 hours
- If you are on antifungal therapy, soak your denture in anti-fungal solution

### DIRECTIONS FOR USE OF FLUORIDE TRAYS

- Brush and floss before wearing trays.
- Fill the grooves of the trays 1/3 full with gel
- Insert tray and spit out any excess gel
- 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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