

# Three Good Reasons to See a Dentist **BEFORE** Cancer Treatment

# 1

## Feel Better

Cancer treatment can cause side effects in your mouth. A dental checkup before treatment starts can help prevent painful mouth problems.

# 2

## Save teeth and bones

A dentist will help protect your mouth, teeth, and jaw bones from damage caused by head and neck radiation and chemotherapy. Children also need special protection for their growing teeth and facial bones.

# 3

## Fight cancer

Serious side effects in the mouth can delay, or even stop, cancer treatment. To fight cancer best, your cancer care team should include a dentist.



**Oral Health, Cancer Care, and You**  
Fitting the Pieces Together

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health  
National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

# Protect your mouth during cancer treatment

## Brush gently, brush often



- Brush your teeth—and your tongue—gently with an extra-soft toothbrush.
- Soften the bristles in warm water if your mouth is very sore.
- Brush after every meal and at bedtime.

## Floss gently—do it daily



- Floss once a day to remove plaque.
- Avoid areas of your gums that are bleeding or sore, but keep flossing your other teeth.

## Keep your mouth moist



- Rinse often with water.
- Don't use mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- Use a saliva substitute to help moisten your mouth.

## Eat and drink with care



- Choose soft, easy-to-chew foods.
- Protect your mouth from spicy, sour, or crunchy foods.
- Choose lukewarm foods and drinks instead of hot or icy-cold.
- Avoid alcoholic drinks.

## Stop using tobacco



- Ask your cancer care team to help you stop smoking or chewing tobacco. People who quit smoking or chewing tobacco have fewer mouth problems.

# Tips to help you care for mouth problems

## ✓ Sore Mouth, Sore Throat

To help keep your mouth clean, rinse often with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon each of baking soda and salt in 1 quart of warm water. Follow with a plain water rinse. Ask your cancer care team about medicines that can help with the pain.

## ✓ Dry Mouth

Rinse your mouth often with water, use sugar-free gum or candy, and talk to your dentist about saliva substitutes.

## ✓ Infections

Call your cancer care team right away if you see a sore, swelling, bleeding, or a sticky, white film in your mouth.

## ✓ Eating Problems

Your cancer care team can help by giving you medicines to numb the pain from mouth sores and showing you how to choose foods that are easy to swallow.

## ✓ Bleeding

If your gums bleed or hurt, avoid flossing the areas that are bleeding or sore, but keep flossing other teeth. Soften the bristles of your toothbrush in warm water.

## ✓ Stiffness in Chewing Muscles

Three times a day, open and close your mouth as far as you can without pain. Repeat 20 times.

## ✓ Vomiting

Rinse your mouth after vomiting with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of warm water.

## ✓ Cavities

Brush your teeth after meals and before bedtime. Your dentist might have you put fluoride gel on your teeth to help prevent cavities.

## When should you call your cancer care team about mouth problems?



Take a moment each day to check how your mouth looks and feels.

Call your cancer care team when

- ✓ you first notice a mouth problem.
- ✓ an old problem gets worse.
- ✓ you notice any changes you're not sure about.

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For additional copies contact:  
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NIH Publication No. 09-5494  
Reprinted September 2009