

# Three Good Reasons to See a Dentist Before Cancer Treatment



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

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health

### About *Three Good Reasons To See a Dentist Before Cancer Treatment*

Thank you for your interest in *Three Good Reasons To See a Dentist Before Cancer Treatment*. This publication is intended for adults with limited reading skills. It was developed by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), one of the federal government's National Institutes of Health.

This booklet provides important oral health information to patients with cancer through a series of unique illustrations called pictographs—pictures that represent ideas. Research conducted at the Johns Hopkins Oncology Center found that when pictographs were used, patients' abilities to remember how to deal with problems associated with cancer treatment increased significantly. The pictographs consist of simple sketches with stick figures, allowing actions to be depicted in a clear, culturally neutral manner.

In *Three Good Reasons To See a Dentist Before Cancer Treatment*, pictographs inform people who have been diagnosed with cancer about the oral health complications they may develop because of their treatment. The illustrations depict patients and the cancer care team in situations that highlight why patients need to seek dental care before, during, and after cancer treatment. Further, the pictographs explain steps patients can take during treatment to prevent or minimize oral health problems.

*Three Good Reasons To See a Dentist Before Cancer Treatment* is most effective when a member of the health care team explains the booklet to the patient. Each pictograph represents actions that need to be reviewed. Introduced in this way, the pictographs serve to remind patients of the instructions when the booklet is reviewed at home.

If you have any questions about this booklet or would like to order more copies, contact the National Oral Health Information Clearinghouse, a service of NIDCR.

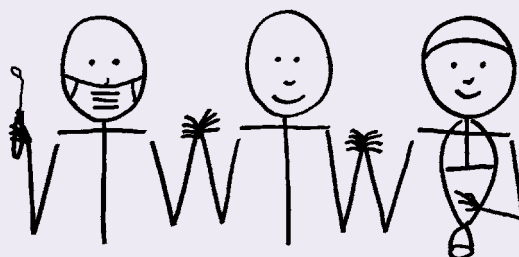
National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research"  
National Oral Health Information Clearinghouse  
1 NOHIC Way  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3500  
1-866-232-4528  
<http://www.nidcr.nih.gov>



# Three Good Reasons to See a Dentist Before Cancer Treatment

## 1 Fight Cancer

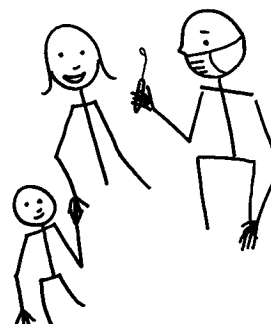
Your cancer care team should include a dentist.



## 2

## Save Your Teeth and Bones

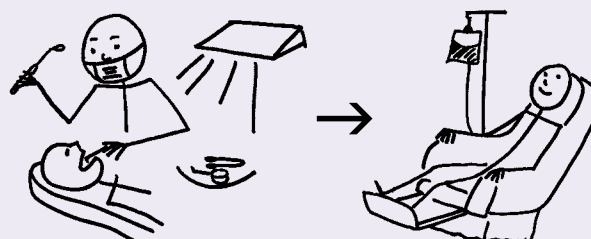
Children also need special protection.



## 3

## Feel Better

Make sure you have a dental check up before your first cancer treatment.





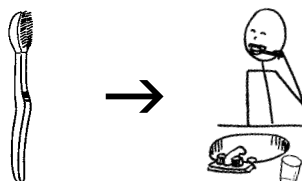
# Protect Your Mouth During Cancer Treatment



**Soak an extra-soft toothbrush in warm water to make it softer.**



**Brush your teeth and tongue gently.**



**Brush after every meal.**



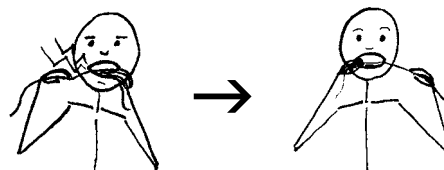
**Brush at bedtime.**



**Floss once a day.**



**If flossing hurts in one place, keep flossing in the others.**



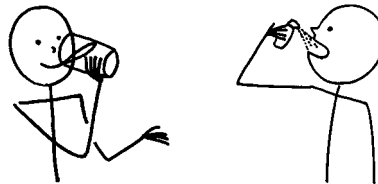
**Rinse often with water.**



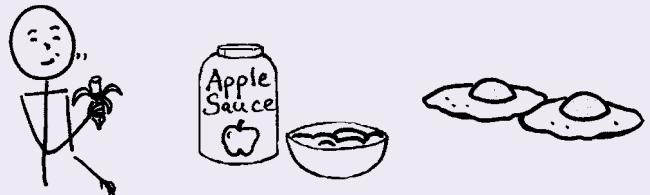
**Don't use mouthwash with alcohol in it.**



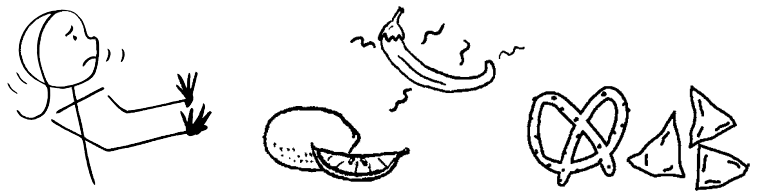
**Sip water and use a saliva substitute to keep your mouth moist.**



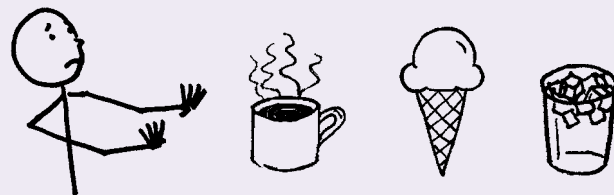
**Choose soft, easy-to-chew foods.**



**Avoid spicy, sour, or crunchy foods.**



**Avoid very hot or icy-cold food.**



**Avoid alcohol.**



**Stop smoking or chewing tobacco.**

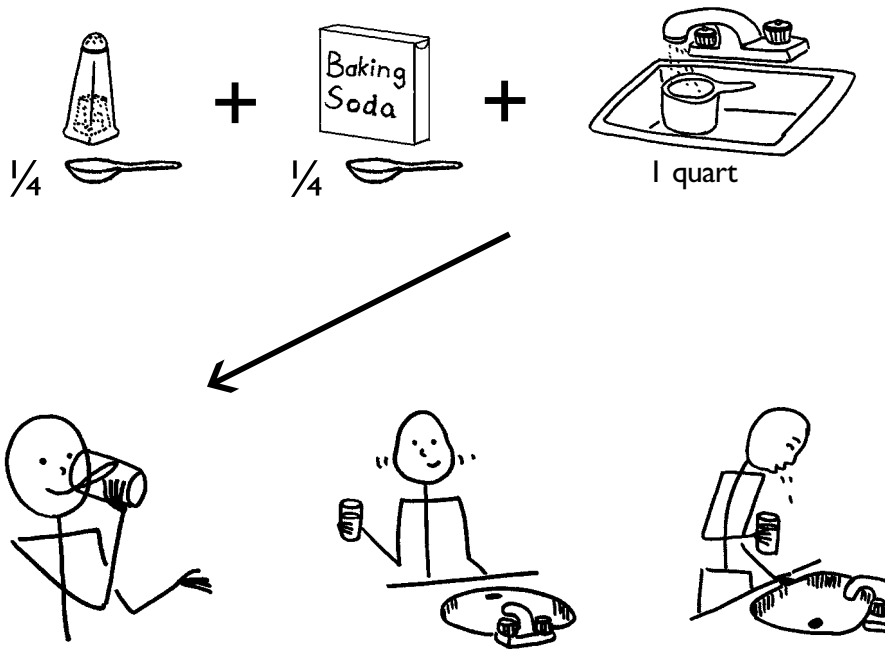


# Tips for Mouth Problems

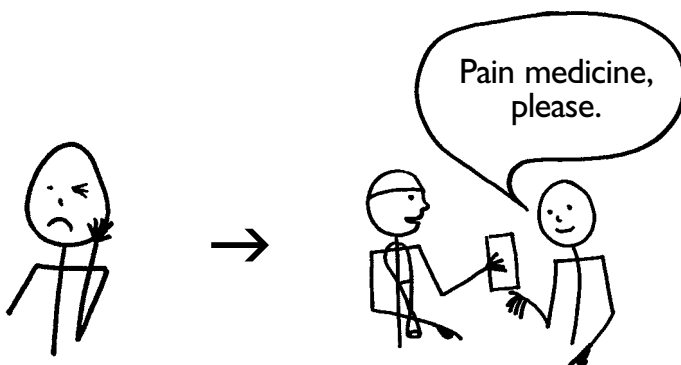
## Sore Mouth, Sore Throat



- Rinse often with
  - $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of salt and
  - $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of baking soda in 1 quart (4 cups) of warm water
  - Don't swallow.



- 
- Ask your cancer care team about medicine that can help with the pain.



## Dry Mouth



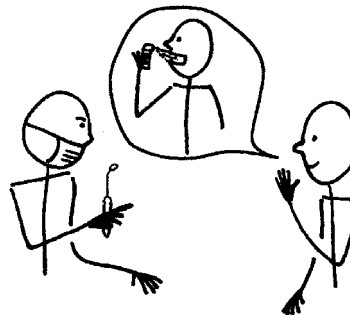
- Sip water often.



- Use sugar-free gum or candy.



- Talk to your dentist about saliva substitutes.



## Eating Problems



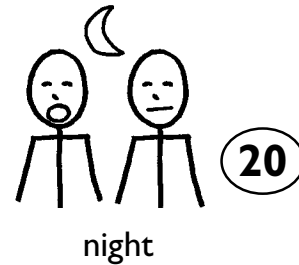
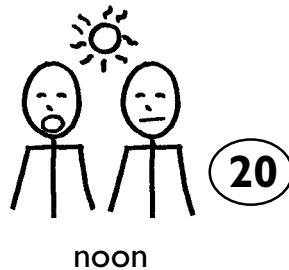
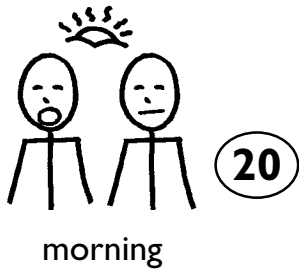
- Ask for medicine to numb the pain.



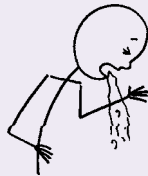
## Stiff Chewing Muscles



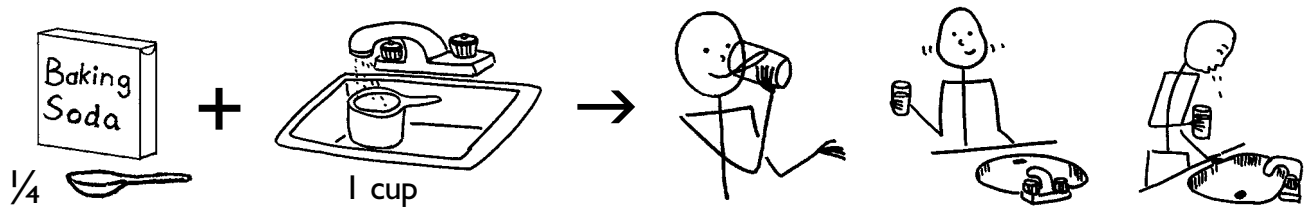
- Three times a day, open and close your mouth as far as you can without pain. Repeat 20 times.



## Vomiting



- Rinse your mouth after vomiting. Use  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of warm water.
- Don't swallow.



## Cavities



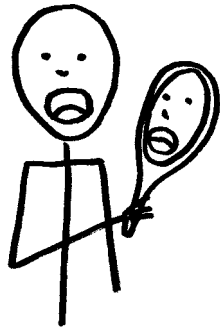
- Ask your dentist to put fluoride on your teeth to help prevent cavities.





# When to Call Your Cancer Care Team

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Check your mouth every day.



**Sores**



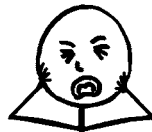
**Swelling**



**Bleeding**



**Pain**



**Sticky  
white film**



## Oral Health, Cancer Care, and You

This booklet is part of the series, **Oral Health, Cancer Care, and You: Fitting the Pieces Together**. It was developed by the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research in partnership with the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Nursing Research, components of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Publications in this series include:

### For Patients:

Chemotherapy and Your Mouth

*La quimioterapia y la boca*

Head and Neck Radiation Treatment  
and Your Mouth

*La boca y el tratamiento de radiación en  
la cabeza y el cuello*

Three Good Reasons to See a Dentist  
BEFORE Cancer Treatment

*Tres buenas razones para ver a un dentista  
ANTES de comenzar el tratamiento contra  
el cáncer*

Three Good Reasons to See a Dentist  
BEFORE Cancer Treatment (illustrated  
booklet for adults with limited reading skills)

### For Health Professionals:

Dental Provider's Oncology Pocket Guide

Oral Complications of Cancer Treatment:  
What the Dental Team Can Do

Oncology Pocket Guide to Oral Health

Oral Complications of Cancer Treatment:  
What the Oncology Team Can Do

### For free copies of these publications:

Order online at [www.nidcr.nih.gov](http://www.nidcr.nih.gov) or contact:

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