

Information for patients and carers

Looking after your Mouth during Radiotherapy to the Head and Neck

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue. The top band is a light blue, the middle is a medium blue, and the bottom is a dark blue.

This leaflet aims to provide general mouth care advice and useful tips for patients to ease side effects from radiotherapy treatment to the head and neck area. It is important to keep your mouth clean from the start of treatment. This will help prevent infection when your mouth or throat becomes sore.

General tips/advice

- Eat a softer, more liquid diet.
- Drink plenty of water based fluids such as cordial, 2 litres daily.
- Have a drink by your bed so you can moisten your mouth and throat during the night.
- Avoid smoking, this is proven to worsen side effects – if you would like help to stop smoking, please ask for a leaflet about the support we can offer.
- Avoid drinking alcohol, especially spirits which can increase irritation in your mouth.
- Avoid hot, spicy, acidic or pickled foods.
- Avoid hard, crunchy foods such as crisps, which may scratch your mouth and throat.

Looking after your mouth

- Continue to clean your teeth, with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste, twice daily.
- If you wear dentures, you may wish to leave them out except at mealtimes. Dentures should be kept clean.
- You should use mouthwash at least 4 times a day, after meals and at bedtime. As your mouth becomes sore, you should increase this to every 2-3 hours. We recommend a salt and water solution (1tsp salt diluted in 500mls of warm water).
- If you require mouthwash this will be prescribed by your Oncologist. Please **do not** use commercial mouthwashes, as these tend to be too harsh.
- Apply a non-scented moisturiser to your lips as needed.

Other potential problems

Thrush

It is quite common to develop a fungal infection in your mouth during radiotherapy treatment. This appears as whitish patches in your mouth. If you do get a fungal infection, you will be prescribed an anti-fungal medicine.

Dry mouth

If your mouth feels dry and uncomfortable there are several things that may help. Try carrying a small bottle of water with you wherever you go so that you can moisten your mouth. You may also find chewing sugar free gum or sucking on sugar free sweets helpful.

Coated tongue

This may not happen until after treatment finishes and is more common if you are eating a soft diet or are on a tube feed. Try gently brushing your tongue with a soft toothbrush 3 or 4 times a day. Ask your health care professional team for further advice.

Taste changes

You may find your sense of taste changes. Food may all taste sweet, salty or metallic. How much your sense of taste changes depends on your treatment. You should notice some improvement between 4 and 12 months after finishing radiotherapy.

Always let the Radiographers know if you get any side effects. We need you to tell us exactly how you feel not only with regard to side effects, but also your general wellbeing.

Smoking

It has been proven that smoking can make your radiotherapy side effects worse and reduce the effectiveness of the treatment. It is important that you reduce or stop smoking whilst on treatment.

We understand that this may be difficult at such a stressful time and staff are very open to discussing this with you and offering you the support you may need. There are contact details for Smokefree Lancashire

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

Radiotherapy Reception **(01772) 522923**

Appointments **(01772) 522931**

Transport **(01772) 522295**

If you would like to watch a short information video about radiotherapy, please scan the QR code below.



Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

Stop smoking services

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/keeping-physically-healthy/stop-smoking/>

Macmillan at Rosemere Cancer Centre

<https://tinyurl.com/38z3d2fy>

(01772) 523709

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on any of our premises, either inside or outside the buildings. Our staff will ask you about your smoking status when you come to hospital and will offer you support and advice about stopping smoking this will include Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal and the opportunity to speak to a nurse or advisor from the specialist Tobacco and Alcohol Care Team.

Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/cancer-patient-information-leaflets

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