Mouth and Throat Changes

"My mouth felt sore. I let my nurse know right away. He told me about medicine that can help. He also showed me how to make a mouth rinse to use each day."

Call your doctor or nurse if you have:

- **Trouble eating or swallowing**
- **Painful spots or sores in your mouth**
- **Sores on your lips or in your mouth**

Tell your doctor or nurse if you have:

- Changes in taste or smell
- Dry mouth (little or no saliva)
- Pain when you eat hot or cold foods

Take these steps:

Clean your mouth with care.

- Brush your teeth and tongue after each meal and before you go to bed. Use a very soft toothbrush or cotton swabs.
- Use toothpaste or gel that has fluoride in it.
- Rinse your mouth with the baking soda, salt, and water mix in the box below.

Every 3 hours during the day, mix together:

- **1 cup warm water,**
- **1/4 teaspoon baking soda, and**
- **1/8 teaspoon salt.**

Take small sips and swish them around in your mouth. Then rinse with plain water.

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Keep your mouth and lips moist.

- Use a lip balm.
- Sip water or suck ice chips.
- Try drinking through a straw.

Eat soft, bland foods.

- Choose foods that are soft, wet, and easy to swallow. When your mouth is sore, try cooked cereals, mashed potatoes, and scrambled eggs.
- Soften food with gravy, sauce, or other liquids.
- Let food cool down if hot food hurts your mouth.

Ask for pain medicine if your mouth or throat is sore.

Don't have things that can make your mouth hurt.

- **Don't** drink orange, lemon, tomato, or grapefruit juice.
- **Don't** drink alcohol, such as beer or wine.
- **Don't** eat crunchy or spicy foods.
- **Don't** have foods or drinks that have sugar in them, such as candy and soft drinks.
- **Don't** smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products.

Questions to ask your doctor or nurse:

1. What problems should I call you about?
2. What foods and drinks should I have?
3. Can we make the baking soda, salt, and water mix together?
4. What kind of toothpaste is best for me?
5. If brushing hurts, what are other ways that I can clean my mouth?
6. What medicines can help?

Visit a dentist at least 2 weeks before you start treatment. Get all of your dental work done before you start chemotherapy, if at all possible. Get a copy of the report from your dentist and give it to your doctor or nurse.

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How can we help?

National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service

Phone: 1-800-422-6237 (1-800-4-CANCER)
Web: www.cancer.gov
Online Chat: www.cancer.gov/livehelp

NCI has a series of 18 Chemotherapy Side Effects Sheets at:
www.cancer.gov/chemo-side-effects

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