



# RADIATION TREATMENT TO THE MOUTH AND THROAT

The following information will help you manage the side effects you may experience from radiation therapy. Your doctor, nurse or radiation therapists will provide you with any additional information you need. Please ask them any questions you may have.

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## DURING YOUR TREATMENT

Do not use commercial mouthwash, alcohol or tobacco (cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, pipe tobacco, snuff) – they are irritating to the inside of the mouth and throat.

After several weeks of treatments, your mouth may produce less saliva than normal. To moisten your mouth, suck sugar-free hard candy or use a squirt bottle of water. Mouth dryness may be permanent and an artificial saliva may be prescribed if necessary. Discuss this with your doctor. You may temporarily lose your sense of taste. If you do, it will be three to six months after you finish your treatments before your sense of taste improves.

After two to three weeks of treatment, your mouth and throat will become temporarily sore and irritated. It is important to keep your mouth clean. Please discuss all mouth rinses with your doctor and report to your doctor any ulcerations which occur in your mouth in the area affected by radiation therapy.

Try rinsing and gargling with:

- Solution of ½ teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 1 quart of room temperature water may be helpful. Continue gargling with the salt and soda solution until healing has occurred (usually about two weeks).
  - Solution of 1 part hydrogen peroxide and 4 to 5 parts water can also be used. Medications are available to help decrease the soreness associated with radiation therapy to the lining of your mouth or throat. Tell your doctor about any sore area(s) in your mouth.
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## DIET

When you develop soreness in the mouth and throat, a change in your diet may be needed.

- Avoid rough or sharp foods, acidic foods, very hot or cold foods and drinks, and spicy foods.
- Eat soft or liquid foods. Our dietician can give you information about a soft diet to minimize soreness while maintaining adequate nutrition.
- It is important to drink plenty of fluids – try to drink 2 quarts of room temperature liquids daily. Avoid carbonated drinks.

Because it is important that you not lose weight during treatment, your weight will be recorded daily. To maintain weight, try to eat five to six meals a day of foods high in protein such as meat, milkshakes, eggs and cheese.

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## DENTAL: TEETH AND DENTURES

If you have dentures, our dentist will discuss with you their use during and after your course of radiation therapy and check them to ensure that they fit properly.

Avoid wearing dentures (except for eating) until your next dental appointment or until your doctor informs you that you may start wearing them. About six months after completing your treatment, have your dentures checked to ensure they fit properly. New dentures may be necessary.

If you have your own teeth, lack of saliva can cause increased decay and make them more sensitive to heat, cold, sweetness or sourness. Our dentist will prescribe fluoride to help prevent decay and decrease the sensitivity of your teeth. Continue fluoride treatments, if prescribed by your doctor, and have regular check-ups.

If you need tooth extractions or other major dental work, consult with your Mary Bird Perkins doctor or dentist before any work is done.

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## SKIN CARE

- Use only an electric razor and do not shave within the treated areas. Do not use pre-shave or after-shave lotion until the treated area is healed. The radiation therapy will suppress hair growth in the treated areas.

- Do not apply any lotion, powder or creams to the treated skin except when recommended by your doctor. Do not scratch the treated skin; applying pressure will help relieve itching.
  - If the skin in the treated area begins to itch or cause discomfort, discuss the problem with your doctor.
  - Shirts, blouses or neck scarves worn during treatment should be soft. Avoid any clothing that rubs against the treated area.
  - Avoid exposing treated skin to direct sunlight.
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## **AFTER HOURS**

If you need immediate emergency medical attention, please dial 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. All other medical attention outside of the Center's regular office hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday) will be answered by our telephone answering service who will have a doctor from Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center return your call.

### **TELEPHONE:**

**Essen:** (225) 767-0847

**Woman's:** (225) 215-7100

**Gonzales:** (225) 664-1205

**Hammond:** (985) 542-5000

**Covington:** (985) 875-2234

**Houma:** (985) 876-9045

**Natchez:** (601) 442-1285