

# How to Care for Yourself After Head and Neck Radiation Begins



## EATING AND DRINKING

*Your Dietitian will continue to help you with your eating and drinking*

- Try to keep your weight the same and your swallowing working by continuing to eat high protein and high calorie soft or blended foods
- Start eating regular foods when pain stops, and chewing and swallowing is easier
- Return to a regular balanced diet according to UK Food Guide to Healthy Eating - Live Well
- Aim to drink 8 cups of water each day (avoid alcohol and caffeine)
- Try to keep your weight the same for the first 6 to 8 weeks after you are done treatment

## SWALLOWING

*Your Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) will continue to help you with your swallowing*

- You may go for another swallowing assessment 8 weeks after your last treatment to see how you are swallowing

**Swallowing and Diet Changes**

- Continue with the same diet until told differently
- Continue to follow the Swallowing Safety guidelines (See “Before Radiation” sheet)

**Swallowing Exercises**

- Do each exercise 5-10 times, 3 times a day for at least 6 months after your treatment is done or as advised by your SLT

**Radiation Changes to Swallowing**

- Short term side effects of treatment may get better 1-2 months after radiation treatment is completed

## ORAL CARE

*Your Dental Oncology team will continue to help you with your mouth care*

**Flossing**

- Floss at least once daily if you are able
- An anaesthetic rinse may be prescribed for you to use prior to flossing if necessary

**Brushing**

- An anaesthetic rinse may be prescribed for you to use prior to brushing your teeth if necessary
  - Soften bristles with hot water
  - Maintain gentle brushing after meals and before bed
  - To clear your mouth use a clean wet cloth soaked in mouth rinse

**Rinsing (See “Mouth Rinse Recipe” on back)**

- Rinse with mouth rinse after...
  - Brushing
  - Flossing
  - Eating
- Rinse every 1-2 hours while you are awake
- Apply fluoride gel to your teeth using fluoride trays daily or use fluoridated toothpaste to prevent tooth decay

*Inform your Dental Team if you are no longer able to use your fluoride toothpaste and/or tray*

**Oral Moisturizing**

- Moisturising nasal passages using steaming or a nebuliser if you have been given one as part of your care
- Moisturize with mouth rinse and lubricants more often
  - Avoid vaseline jelly and glycerin products
- Sugarless gum and/or lozenges may help to stimulate saliva, but do not use if your mouth is painful

**Lip Care**

- Use water soluble, wax based, or oil based lubricants often
  - Do not apply vaseline jelly

## SKIN CARE

*Your Radiation Treatment team will continue to help you with your skin care.*

*Continue to care for your skin as advised by your treatment team until your skin has healed*

**Your skin will take time to heal**

- Your skin will start to improve 2-3 weeks after you have finished your treatments
- Your skin colour may take 3-4 weeks to return to normal
- Your skin will be sensitive after it has healed
- Continue to follow your skin care as outlined on the “Before/During Radiation” sheets
- Use unperfumed water based body lotions or creams 4 times per day as advised by your Oncology team
- Avoid sun exposure in the treatment area
- Avoid prolonged sun exposure and use a sunscreen when your skin has healed (SPF 30 or greater)

**Hair loss may be temporary or permanent**

- Your hair in the treatment area may grow back 3-6 months after treatment
- This new hair may be thinner and/or feel different than before your treatment

## TUBE FEEDING AND CARE

*If you have a feeding tube, Your Dietitian and healthcare team will work with you to manage your tube feeding and care*

- Continue your tube feed and work with your RD to adjust your feeds as you start to eat and drink more by mouth
- Your feeding tube may be removed by your doctor or surgeon when you have been able to maintain your weight without using your feeding tube for nutrition (the length of time will be decided by your Doctor)

# Oral Care

## MOUTH RINSE BLAND RECIPE



1 level teaspoon  
(5 ml) of salt



1 level teaspoon  
(5 ml) of baking soda



4 cups (1 L)  
of water

### HOW TO MAKE YOUR MOUTH RINSE

- 1 level teaspoon (5 ml) of salt
- Put the mouthwash in a container with a lid
- The mouthwash should be kept at room temperature
- Discard any remaining mouth rinse at the end of each day and make a new batch

### HOW TO USE YOUR MOUTH RINSE

- Shake well before using
- Rinse and gargle with one tablespoon (15 ml) and then spit out
- Repeat 2 or 3 times at each use
- Use mouthwash every 2 hours during the day

### DENTURE CARE

- Keep your dentures out as much as possible if they are causing pain
- Remove dentures, plates and prostheses before brushing
- Gently brush and rinse dentures after meals and before bed. Avoid vigorous scrubbing
- Soak dentures in cleansing solution for at least 8 hours
- If you are on antifungal therapy, soak your denture in anti-fungal solution

### DIRECTIONS FOR USE OF FLUORIDE TRAYS

- Brush and floss before wearing trays.
- Fill the grooves of the trays 1/3 full with gel
- Insert tray and spit out any excess gel
- Leave the tray in for 5 minutes
  - Use at bedtime for longer lasting results
  - Brush trays and air dry after each use
  - Do not** use hot water to clean trays (hot water will distort the tray)
  - Do not** eat, drink or rinse for 30 minutes after tray use

*Inform your Dental team if you are no longer able to use your fluoride trays.*

### IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT YOUR CARE:

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