



Treatment Guidelines

Head and Neck

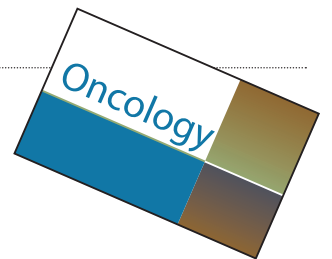
The information that you find here is to help you know what to expect during your treatment. It also helps you to learn ways to deal with any side effects that you may have. Please ask a member of the treatment team (doctor, nurse, technologist and nutritionist) to answer any of your questions.

Introduction

Radiation therapy side effects vary from person to person. The side effects depend on several things such as the area of the body to be treated, the type of radiation used, the amount of radiation, whether you are having chemotherapy at the same time and your general health.

Oncology Passport

This is your tool to write information and keep track of your diagnosis, treatment, possible symptoms and resources. Please bring it with you everyday.



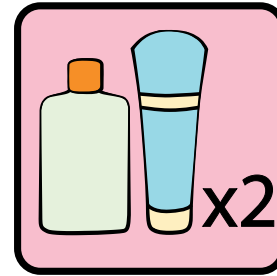
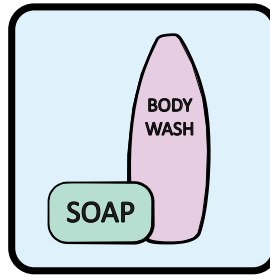
Treatment Set Up

- The technologist may apply ink “markings” on your skin for your treatments.
- A technologist will fit you with a mask specially molded for you. The purpose of the mask is to keep your head in a steady position.

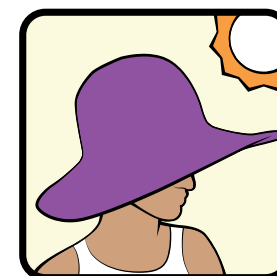
Will the radiation therapy affect my skin?

- When radiation is given it passes through your skin to reach the area to be treated. Skin problems are an expected side effect for people who receive radiation therapy. Your skin might become dry, itchy, red or darker in color and sometimes peel or weep.
- Advise the technologist if you notice any skin dryness, itching, tenderness, redness, or changes in your skin that make you uncomfortable.
- Depending on the dose of therapy, you will not lose your hair except to the area that is receiving treatment.

How should I care for my skin during treatment?



- Take quick showers or baths.
- Lather your hands with soap and apply gently to your skin.
- Wash your skin gently with lukewarm water and mild unscented soap such as Ivory® or Dove®.
- Rinse your skin well and pat dry with a soft towel.
- Twice daily apply unscented lotion such as Lubriderm®, Aveeno® or Lipikar®.
- Do not apply cream or lotion on skin even if the doctor prescribed it for at least 4 hours before treatment.
- If you have skin breakdown, stop using lotion. If necessary, the doctor will prescribe another cream for you.
- Apply Vaseline®, Ceralip® or lip balm to keep lips moist.
- Apply cool compresses for 10 to 15 minutes 4 times a day to relieve itching or burning.
- Choose clothes with soft fabrics and wear natural fibers such as cotton.
- Protect area of treatment from sunlight or cold and wind in winter.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat or scarf in sunlight.
- Continue to protect skin after treatment ends, and wear sunscreen SPF 30 or greater when outdoors.



What should I avoid doing to my skin?

- Do not wash off the skin markings.
- Do not rub, scrub or scratch your skin.
- Do not shave the area of treatment. If you must shave, use an electric razor every 2 days.
- Do not use aftershave lotion, perfume or makeup on the area of treatment.
- Do not use tape on the area of treatment.
- Do not use ice packs, heating pads or hot water bottles on the treatment area.
- Avoid tight, restrictive clothing.
- Avoid direct sun exposure to the area of treatment. Keep those areas of the skin covered if you must sit or stand in direct sunlight.

What else should I avoid?

1. Smoking

- It is recommended that all patients stop smoking. Smoking adds to irritation of your throat and mouth during treatment and can increase the risk of disease returning.
- Help is available for you to stop smoking. Please ask one of your treatment team members for information.

2. Alcohol

- It is recommended that all patients stop drinking alcohol during treatment. Alcohol can add to irritation of the throat and mouth.
- Help is available to stop drinking alcohol. Please ask one of your treatment team members for information.

Taking care of my mouth and teeth

- If you are receiving therapy to your head and/or neck, you need to take special care of your mouth, teeth and gums.
- Depending on the area treated, a consultation with the hospital dentist may be scheduled before treatment begins for the following:
 - To evaluate your mouth and teeth.
 - To do a good cleaning.
 - To fix any teeth that need repair. If any tooth is found to be at risk of infection, then your tooth will likely need to be pulled out.
- You will have an appointment with the hospital dentist once a week during treatment.

How will radiation therapy affect my mouth and teeth?

Mouth soreness

- Soreness and redness in your mouth, tongue, throat, and lips may occur especially if you are receiving both chemotherapy and radiation.

Dry mouth

- Radiation may affect or damage the glands that make your saliva or “spit”. This damage may make the saliva thick and sticky and also make the mouth dry.
- A dry mouth may make swallowing, eating and talking difficult. Dry mouth may be short-lived or last a long time.
- Your lips may also become sore and cracked.

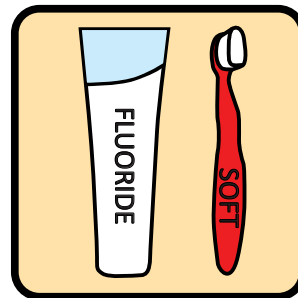
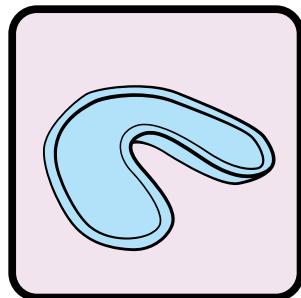
Tooth decay

- Poor mouth care and a dry mouth can increase tooth decay, disease of the gums and infection of the jaw.

What can I do when radiotherapy starts?

1. Keep your mouth and teeth clean

- Brush your teeth with a soft or baby toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste as instructed by your dentist.
- If you receive chemotherapy, check with your dentist and doctor if you can use dental floss.
- Use fluoride gels or trays (if prescribed by the dentist).



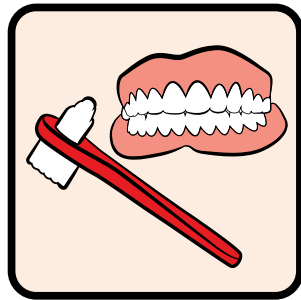
2. Avoid commercial mouthwashes

- Most over-the-counter mouthwashes have alcohol, can dry your mouth, and should not be used.

3. Keep dentures clean

- Brush your dentures every day with denture brush and denture toothpaste. Rinse well.
- Take out your dentures at night while sleeping

- Avoid wearing your dentures during the day if gums are sore. This will allow your gums to rest and heal.
- Store your dentures in a clean cup with denture cleaner. Change the solution daily to prevent germs from growing.
- Clean your mouth and gums with a sponge and saline solution.

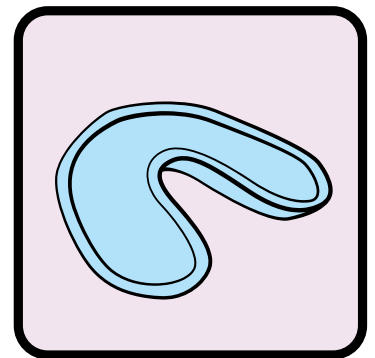


4. Use the following mouthwash solution 4 times a day to rinse your mouth

- This rinse will moisten and clean your mouth.
 - 1 cup water
 - ¼ teaspoon salt (reduce or remove salt if your mouth burns)
 - ½ teaspoon baking soda.
- For a mild sore throat, rinse every 2 to 3 hours, do not swallow.
- For a severe sore throat, rinse every 1 to 2 hours, do not swallow.

5. Use fluoride trays (if prescribed)

- Every night before bedtime and for the duration of the treatment and the rest of your life:
 - Apply 6 to 10 drops of gel into each tray.
 - Insert tray into your mouth (one at a time) and leave tray in place for 10 minutes. If it is difficult, you can do it one tray at a time.
 - After using your tray, spit out excess gel, do not rinse, drink or eat.
- If the trays cause your gums or mouth to burn, let the dentist or nurse know so that changes can be made.
- If it is impossible for you to use the fluoride trays, consult your dental hygienist and/or your radiation nurse.



6. Use Magic Mouthwash (if prescribed)

- During treatment, if you develop a sore throat, your doctor may prescribe Magic Mouthwash.
- This is a combination of medications given to reduce pain and to prevent or treat mouth infections that are common while receiving treatment.
- Use Magic Mouthwash 4 times daily (1/2 hour prior to meals and before bedtime) or as directed.
- Swish the Magic Mouthwash in your mouth and then swallow it slowly.
- If for some reason you are unable to use the Magic Mouthwash, tell your doctor or nurse.

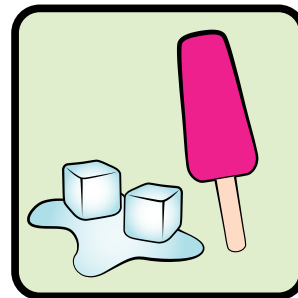
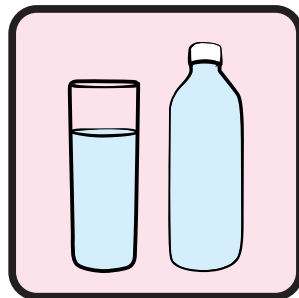


7. Mouth pain

- If your mouth pain is not controlled with the use of mouth rinses or the Magic Mouthwash, the doctor can prescribe a medication to control pain.
- It is important that you tell a member of your treatment team if your pain is not well controlled.

8. Dry mouth

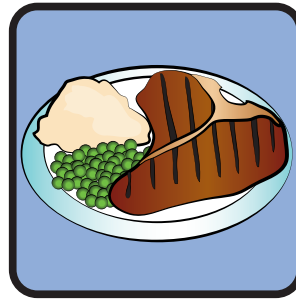
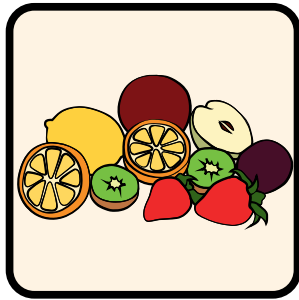
- Several commercial products are available for the treatment of dry mouth and may be used during treatment.
- Try Oral Balance Gel and Gum[®], Moisture Spray[®], MouthKote[®] or Biotene[®].
- Carry a bottle of water with you. Taking sips frequently may be helpful.
- Suck on ice chips or popsicles.



What are other possible side effects?

Taste changes

- Treatment may change how foods taste, may cause loss of appetite, or cause nausea.
- Eat balanced healthy meals to improve and maintain energy and strength
- Eat smaller and more frequent meals.
- Do not attempt to lose weight during treatment since nutrition is important for healing.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Your doctor may prescribe medication to help you deal with nausea and vomiting.
- You will meet with the nutritionist regularly to receive useful information to guide your nutrition.



Will I feel tired?

- Fatigue or a feeling of tiredness is a common side effect and can continue for several months after radiation therapy ends.
- If you are tired, take naps or rest as needed.
- Continue your regular activities but limit yourself when you feel tired.
- Have a friend or family member come with you to your appointment for support and to assist with driving and daily activities.
- Mild physical activity such as walking is encouraged and may be helpful to fight fatigue.
- Fatigue is also common among persons who are depressed or have difficulty to cope. Talk to your treatment team.



What can I do if I feel overwhelmed?

- Feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, or of difficulty to cope are normal. Each person has a different way of dealing with difficult situations. Tell the team if you are having any of these feelings.
- We can offer you counseling with our Psychosocial Oncology Program.
- We can also offer information and/or referral for support, such as Can Support at MUHC or community based self-help groups.

Where can I get information on the Internet?

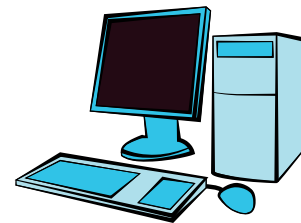
Not all information found on the Internet is accurate or reliable. If you have access to the Internet and you would like more information on your cancer or its treatment, you can visit these reliable websites:

www.cancer.ca - Canadian Cancer Society

www.fqc.qc.ca - Fondation Québécoise du Cancer

www.cancer.net - American Society of Clinical Oncology

www.cancer.gov - National Cancer Institute



What should I do if I feel very sick or if there is an emergency?

Should you experience any serious reactions that are causing you to worry, please call your doctor or nurse

- Weekdays - tel: 514-934-1934 ext. 43400.
- During the weekend: call the MUHC switchboard - tel: 514- 934-1934 and ask for the Radiation Oncology Resident on Call.
- If your symptoms are particularly severe or you are unable to reach the Radiation Oncologist you should go to the emergency room of the nearest hospital and tell them you are receiving radiation therapy.

IMPORTANT PLEASE READ

Information provided by pamphlet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.

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