

# Dental management

## Information for patients undergoing head and neck radiation therapy

### *Why should i see a dentist before starting radiation therapy?*

Head and neck radiotherapy will not only have effects on your cancer but also on healthy cells in the field of radiation. Affecting those cells will induced changes in your mouth and surrounding organs. The results are:

1. Pain and burning sensation in the mouth
2. Lack or absence of saliva
3. Temporary taste lost
4. Ulcers or sores in mouth and throat
5. Higher risk of infection in the mouth
6. Difficulty opening the mouth

### *Pain and burning sensation in the mouth*

This sensation is the result of a reactive inflammation of the oral and oropharyngeal mucous membrane during radiotherapy in the head and neck region. The condition is like a burn and inevitable but transient. The mucosa appears reddened. Usually, the sensitivity and dry mouth starts the second week of radiotherapy and stops 2-3 weeks after. No drugs can prevent sore mouth but it is possible to relief the symptoms. You can use this little recipe for it:

- 1 teaspoon of baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon of salt
- 8 oz of water

Make this proportion in a big bottle and rinse with as often as you can – every 2-3 hours while awake. Your doctor may prescribe additional pain medication and mouthrinse.

### *Lack or absence of saliva*

Head and neck radiation therapy often includes the salivary glands in the field of radiation. Having no saliva is very uncomfortable. This condition can be permanent or improve slightly after your treatment. Less saliva has many consequences:

- Dryness of the mouth (xerostomia)
- Rampant caries (Teeth cavities)
- Burning sensation
- Increased tendency for yeast infection
- Increased thirst
- Taste lost or alteration
- Difficulties in oral eating and swallowing
- Fragility of oral tissues
- Difficulties in wearing dentures
- Shift in oral microflora and gum disease
- Nocturnal oral discomfort
- Mucous accumulation

### *To reduce the risk of having radiation caries, you must:*

- have excellent oral hygiene: brushing teeth twice a day and flossing once a day – especially after eating
- daily use of fluoride trays
- limit any cariogenic foods/drinks (sugar)
- always have with you a wetting agent (bottle of water or saliva substitute)
- be motivated to keep all your teeth

### ***How to use your fluoride trays:***

- use at bedtime
- brush and floss teeth
- dispense 6-10 drops of gel into each tray
- insert tray in mouth for 10 minutes
- remove tray and spit any excess gel in mouth
- do not rinse or eat for 30 minutes
- do not smoke
- rinse trays, dry and return to container
- continue using fluoride trays after your treatment as long as your mouth is dry

### ***Taste lost, risk of infections, difficulty opening the mouth***

Most negative effect of radiation therapy usually improves after treatment is discontinued.

Any side effects that incapacitated you during your treatment should be discussed with your oncologist or your dentist. In order to prevent them, close follow-ups are needed before, during (every week) and after the treatment with your dentist.

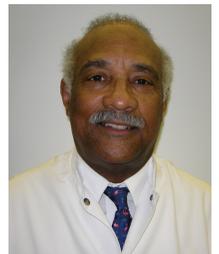
### ***A Word from Your Doctor Dr. Martin T. Tyler***

*Dear Patient,*

*As a healthcare professional, your well-being is very important to me. It is for this very reason that we are offering you this document to better inform you about the cancer you are battling.*

*If after having read this document you still have questions, please do not hesitate to ask them during your next appointment, or contact me at (514) 934-1934, ext. 48063*

***Together we will beat cancer!***



*Special thanks*

We would like to acknowledge the time and efforts of the Dental Clinic who volunteered to write this document to better inform our patients.

***Thank you to the Dental Clinic***



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**IMPORTANT : PLEASE READ**

Information provided in this 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.