

Managing Oral Symptoms

Radiation to the head and neck region can cause symptoms associated with your mouth and throat, such as dry mouth, sore mouth, change in taste, thick mucous, or difficulty opening your mouth. It is very important for you to continue eating and drinking to maintain your weight and avoid dehydration. Please follow the recommendations below in the order they are given, starting with Step 1. If your symptoms are not controlled by the recommendation, continue with that recommendation and proceed to the next step.

Dry Mouth

Step 1: Modify your diet

- Sip on cold fluids throughout the day. Drink plenty of water with meals.
- Avoid hard, spicy foods.
- Lozenges, sugar-free candies and gum, or ice chips can be effective.
- A room humidifier can help alleviate dry lips and mouth.

Step 2: Take Biotene, an over-the-counter medication

- Biotene mouthwash, gum, toothpaste, or mouth spray for dry mouth may be helpful.

Step 3: Consider Salagen, a prescription medication

- Ask your physician if this medication is right for you.
- Take 5 to 10 mg orally three times daily.
- The most common side effect of Salagen is sweating.
- Warning: Before you take Salagen, tell your doctor if you have cardiovascular disease, glaucoma, or uncontrolled asthma.

Sore Mouth

Step 1: Modify your diet

- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Drinking through a straw can make swallowing easier.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and spicy or salty foods.
- Avoid hard foods, such as nuts, crackers, and raw vegetables.
- Eat soft foods such as applesauce, cooked cereals, mashed potatoes, custards, puddings, and high-protein shakes.
- Avoid foods and beverages that are high in acid, such as tomatoes and oranges.
- Avoid hot foods or drinks.
- Continue doing salt and/or baking soda rinses from the “Head and Neck Dental Care” handout.

Step 2: Use Magic Mouthwash, a prescription medication

- Magic Mouthwash is a mixture of several medications (Viscous Lidocaine, Benadryl and Maalox) that can help to soothe and numb sore areas.
- Instructions: Swish and spit 2 teaspoons prior to each meal and at bedtime, 4 times daily. (Note: Your physician may direct you to swish and swallow instead)
- Wait a few minutes after using Magic Mouthwash before eating or drinking.

Step 3: Take pain medication

• If the dietary changes and mouthwashes outlined above do not adequately manage your pain, then it may be necessary for you to take pain medication. Please talk to your nurse or physician.

Taste Change

Step 1: Modify your diet

- Eat bland cheeses, cottage cheese, fresh fruits, gelatin, salads, ice cream, lettuce or peanut butter.
- Prepare foods that look and smell appetizing.
- If red meat doesn't taste right, try chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, and dairy products. Avoid eating fish that has a strong smell.
- Try fruit stuffed with smooth nut butters (for example, dates or bananas with almond butter).
- To add flavor and visual appeal, use fruit or fruit sauces over desserts.

Thick Mucous

Step 1: Modify your diet

- Drink, or insert down your PEG, at least 8 to 10 glasses of fluid each day.
- Humidify the air.
- Continue doing salt and/or baking soda rinses from the "Head and Neck Dental Care" handout.

Trismus (difficulty opening your mouth)

Step 1: Do some exercises

1. Open your mouth as wide as possible 20 times in succession (Repeat 3 times daily)
2. Place heels of both your hands under your jaw to provide resistance and then push up with your hands while stretching your mouth open. This strengthens the muscles.
3. Place the middle and index fingers of one hand on your lower teeth and your thumb on your upper teeth. Next, use your fingers in a twisting motion to pry your mouth open. Hold your mouth open as wide as possible for 2 seconds, and then relax. Repeat 10 times with the right hand. Then repeat with the left hand.
4. Do the entire sequence 4 times a day.

Dry Lips

Step 1: Lip Balm

- Apply a thin layer of lip balm as needed for protection and to seal moisture in lips