

If preferred, a salt water mouthwash may be used instead. This may help with healing if you do develop a sore mouth. You can make your own salt solution by adding a little salt ( $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  a teaspoon) to a cup of warm water.

There is no clinical benefit in using a commercial mouthwash instead of water. However, if you prefer to use one, choose an alcohol-free product (examples include Dentyl®, Colgate Plax®, Oral B® Alcohol Free).

### For patients receiving radiotherapy to the head and neck region

Diffiam® mouthwash may be provided. This contains a painkiller and we recommend you use this before each meal to help make eating easier.

After meals, use water or a salt solution as recommended above for chemotherapy patients.

### Reference sources and further information

- Macmillan Cancer Support produce two leaflets related to mouthcare: *Mouthcare During Chemotherapy* and *Dry Mouth (xerostomia)*
- Macmillan Cancer Support  
[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)  
0808 808 0000

Updated in line with Alliance Mucositis Guidelines by Sue Taylor, oncology pharmacist, on behalf of oncology and haematology nurses and doctors.  
March 2017

### Contact details

For all concerns about your chemotherapy please phone the **Chemotherapy Hotline**  
Monday – Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm  
01483 571122 – Main Switchboard

**Ask for – pager (71) 6516**

All other times and during Bank Holidays

01483 571122 – Main Switchboard

**Ask for – On call Oncology registrar**

### PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm  
Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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Author: Susan Taylor  
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## Good mouth care

- Ashford and St Peter's Hospital
- Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital
- East Surrey Hospital and Crawley Hospital
- Frimley Park Hospital
- Royal Surrey County Hospital

The recommendations in this leaflet apply to all chemotherapy patients, as well as patients receiving radiotherapy to the head and neck region.

This leaflet contains some useful information about looking after your mouth. If you have any questions after reading this, please ask your nurse, pharmacist or doctor.

## **Why is it important to look after my mouth?**

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Good mouth care reduces the risk of developing a sore mouth or mouth ulcers. It also reduces the risk of an infection entering your body via any damaged areas of your mouth. For these reasons, we ask that you follow the recommendations in this leaflet throughout your treatment.

## **How often should I clean my teeth?**

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We recommend that you clean your teeth with toothpaste and a soft toothbrush (manual or electric) four times daily; after each meal, as well as at bedtime.

If your gums become very sore during treatment, we suggest you use a TePe™ special care brush, baby toothbrush or even your fingers to continue regular cleaning in some form if at all possible, rather than stopping altogether.

Again four times daily, after brushing your teeth, rinse your mouth thoroughly (see overleaf for mouthwash options). Try to use a ballooning and sucking motion of the cheeks for at least 30 seconds, as it is this action that removes loose debris from the teeth.

## **Do I need a new toothbrush?**

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We advise that you replace your toothbrush/ toothbrush head every 3 months (or sooner if the bristles become splayed) to minimise infection risk. However, we also recommend that haematology patients or anyone who develops mouth ulcers while on chemotherapy change their toothbrush with each new cycle of chemotherapy.

## **What about flossing?**

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Careful dental flossing, or brushing between teeth with interdental brushes, once daily is recommended, unless you are at risk of having a low blood platelet count. If this is the case, avoid using floss or interdental brushes as this may irritate the gums, and so cause excessive bleeding. If you are a haematology patient or if you are unsure whether you should do the above, check with one of your cancer doctors or nurses first.

## **What if I have dentures?**

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Dentures should be cleaned after each meal and soaked overnight in your usual solution.

## **Is there any other advice?**

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You may keep your lips moist with Vaseline or soft paraffin, or your own lip salve.

To keep your mouth as healthy as possible, it is important to try to drink and eat as well as possible, although alcohol and tobacco should ideally be avoided. Also note that spicy foods may irritate the mouth, and care should be taken with rough or crunchy foods as they may damage the mouth lining or gums.

## **Should I visit my dentist?**

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If you are about to receive chemotherapy, and time permits, please have a dental check-up before chemotherapy starts. Routine dental appointments should then continue throughout treatment and follow-up. Again only if there is enough time, it is also a good idea to have your teeth professionally cleaned by a dental hygienist before chemotherapy starts.

If you are having radiotherapy to the head or neck region, a pre-treatment dental examination must be undertaken.

We recommend that you do not visit a dental hygienist whilst having chemotherapy, so as to avoid unnecessary trauma to the gums.

If any urgent dental work is required once chemotherapy has started, it is important that a blood test is performed no more than 48 hours before any dental treatment and your oncologist consulted, to determine the need for a platelet transfusion or for any antibiotic cover.

Finally, if you do develop any problems with your mouth, tell your doctor or nurse at the next hospital visit, so that they can decide what needs to be done. But seek immediate help if your mouth becomes so sore that you are unable to eat or drink.

## **What mouthwash should I use?**

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### **For patients receiving chemotherapy**

Unless you have been advised otherwise, tap water is the recommended solution used to rinse the mouth for chemotherapy patients.