

Dry mouth

Radiotherapy to the head and neck area and some chemotherapy drugs can damage the saliva glands. This may lead to a dry mouth (xerostomia). Sometimes, radiotherapy causes long-lasting or permanent side effects. These are less common and may happen months or years after treatment.

You should see your dentist or hygienist before you start treatment. They can advise on any dental problems and help you get your teeth and gums in the healthiest condition. They may recommend high-fluoride or non-foaming toothpaste to help maintain good oral hygiene and prevent tooth decay.

If you have any mouth problems during treatment, always tell your cancer doctor, nurse or the radiographer. Many hospitals have their own mouth care guidelines for people having cancer treatment. Your doctor or specialist nurse will be able to advise you. They can prescribe mouthwashes and protective gels if needed.

Tips for managing a dry mouth

- Take sips of water and rinse your mouth regularly during the day. You may find fizzy drinks the most refreshing. Keep a glass of water by your bed and carry water with you whenever you go out. Avoid acidic drinks, such as fruit juices.
- Moisten foods with sauces and gravies.
- Sucking on sweets, ice cubes or an ice lolly can help.
- Avoid chocolate and pastry as they can stick to the roof of your mouth.
- Chewing gum can sometimes stimulate your saliva.
- Your doctor can prescribe drugs to stimulate saliva. There are also artificial saliva products that can help moisten the mouth.
- Try using an atomiser spray with cool water to keep your mouth moist.
- If your tongue is 'coated' it can make your food taste unpleasant and might put you off eating. Clean your tongue with a bicarbonate of soda solution. Check with your specialist nurse for further advice.
- It is important not to use any balm on your lips during radiotherapy treatment. Speak to your nurse specialist or radiotherapy team about when you can use lip balm after treatment.

Local resources:

Resource	Contact details

National resources:

Resource	Contact details

Further information

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/eating-problems/sore-mouth.html

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/mouth-problems

Our booklets and leaflets are available to order free on be.macmillan.org.uk

- **Recipes for people affected by cancer**

More information and support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit macmillan.org.uk

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

We produce information in a range of formats and languages. To order these visit macmillan.org.uk/otherformats or call our support line.

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