

Sore mouth or ulcers

Soreness and ulceration of the lining of the mouth or throat is called mucositis. It can be very painful. It can be caused by chemotherapy drugs, targeted therapies or radiotherapy to the head and neck area.

Damage to the cells lining the mouth or throat is usually temporary. Most side effects will go away when treatment ends.

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 reduce soreness and maintain good oral hygiene.

If you have any mouth problems during treatment, always tell your cancer doctor or nurse. 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. You may also need painkillers.

Tips if you have a sore mouth or ulcers

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Some fresh fruit juices may sting your mouth. It may help to try less acidic juices such as peach or pear nectar, blackcurrant or rosehip syrup. Or try milk and milk-based drinks. Avoid alcohol if your mouth is sore.
- Cold foods and drinks may be more soothing. Try adding crushed ice to drinks and eating ice cream or soft milk jellies. Some people find sucking on ice soothing.
- Very hot or cold drinks may irritate your sore mouth, so try having drinks that are lukewarm or at room temperature.
- Try drinking through a straw.
- Soft, bland foods are often easier. Avoid foods that may irritate your mouth, such as hot spices, garlic and salty foods.
- Keep your food moist with sauces and gravies. Avoid rough-textured food, such as toast or raw vegetables, as they can scrape at sore areas.
- If your mouth is sore, your doctor can prescribe soothing or antiseptic lotions or sprays.
- Use a children's soft toothbrush to clean your teeth gently. Avoid toothpicks when cleaning your teeth. If you wear dentures, soak them in a denture-cleaning solution overnight. Leave them out for as long as you can during the day to prevent them rubbing against your gums.
- Tell your doctor or nurse if you find eating and drinking very difficult. You may need extra support to get the nutrition you need.
- Smoking can irritate the mouth and slow healing – try to cut down or stop.
- Tell your doctor or nurse if you have symptoms of a mouth infection, such as white patches on the tongue and mouth.

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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