

# Sore mouth or ulcers

This information is about a sore mouth or ulcers. Some cancer treatments can damage the cells lining your mouth or throat. Your mouth may become very [sore](#). Some people develop mouth ulcers. Soreness and ulceration of the lining of the mouth or throat is called mucositis. It can be very painful. Mucositis can be caused by [chemotherapy](#), [targeted therapy](#), [immunotherapy](#), or [radiotherapy to the head and neck](#). It may also be caused by infection. Any damage is usually temporary, and most side effects improve when treatment ends.

Some people develop a fungal mouth infection called thrush (candidiasis). It can make eating unpleasant and change how things taste. Thrush can coat your tongue, the inside of your cheeks and the back of your throat. It looks red with white patches. Your healthcare team can prescribe an anti-fungal medicine to help.

Your doctor or specialist may recommend using a certain toothpaste, for example a high-fluoride or non-foaming toothpaste to help reduce any soreness. They may also advise you to see your dentist before you start treatment. Different members of your healthcare team can advise you about how to take care of your mouth during treatment. They may look at your mouth to check for any problems. Tell them if your mouth becomes sore or if the soreness gets worse. They can give you something to help.

## Tips if your mouth is sore

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. If fruit juices sting your mouth, try less acidic fruit juices, squashes or cordials such as peach nectar or blackcurrant squash. You could freeze juice in an ice cube tray and suck on the cubes to soothe your mouth.
- Avoid fizzy drinks if they sting your mouth.
- Try milk or milk-based drinks, such as malted drinks, milkshakes and hot chocolate. These can be made using cow's milk, goat's milk or a plant-based alternative such as soya, rice or oat milk.
- Cold food and drinks may be soothing. Try ice cream, soft milk jellies or adding crushed ice to drinks.
- Very hot drinks can irritate your mouth if it is sore. Some people find it better to have drinks that are lukewarm or at room temperature.
- Try drinking through a straw.
- Salty, spicy or acidic food may irritate your mouth, but some people may still enjoy these foods.
- Try to avoid rough-textured food like toast or raw vegetables.
- Keep your food moist by adding sauces and gravies.
- You may find taking painkillers before meals will help. Ask your specialist nurse for advice about what to use. They may suggest using dispersible paracetamol that you can rinse around the inside of your mouth before swallowing.
- Use a soft toothbrush to clean your teeth gently. Do not rinse out toothpaste after you have cleaned your teeth. Just spit out any extra. This leaves a coating of fluoride on your teeth. Avoid using toothpicks. If you want to use dental floss or interdental brushes check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist first.
- If you wear dentures you are usually advised to clean them regularly with soap and water or a denture cleaning paste. Leave them out for as long as you can during the day to prevent them rubbing against your gums. Ask your healthcare team for advice about this.
- Mouthwashes can be very soothing, but many of the ones you can buy in a chemist or shop may be too strong for you. Salt water mouthwashes can help reduce soreness. To make the mouthwash, add 1 teaspoon of salt to 900ml of cold or warm water (just under 2 pints). Rinse this around your mouth and spit it out. Then rinse your mouth with cold or warm water.
- If your mouth is very painful, tell your healthcare team. They can prescribe an anaesthetic gel or mouthwash if needed.

## Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) such as:

- MAC13613 [Eating problems and cancer](#)
- MAC12921 [Side effects of cancer treatment](#)
- MAC16330\_ER [Side effects from chemotherapy](#) – easy read
- MAC16331\_ER [Side effects from radiotherapy](#) – easy read

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://macmillan.org.uk) to [chat online](#) to one of our team.

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

If you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

## Other useful contact details

- [Boots Macmillan Information Pharmacists](#) – online or in Boots stores. Free support. No appointment necessary.

## Notes and questions

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