

INFLAMMATION OF THE MOUTH

■ Important information for you

Chemotherapy and radiotherapy act on the cancerous tumour, but also on rapidly dividing cells like those of the mucous membrane in the mouth and digestive tract. Your gums, the inside of your cheeks, your palate, tongue and throat may become more fragile.

Inflammation of the mucous membrane in the mouth is known as mucositis. There are one or more symptoms – irritation, swelling, a burning sensation, mouth ulcers – and these are sometimes accompanied by difficulty chewing, swallowing or speaking.

To prevent these temporary but painful and distressing complications you are recommended to begin mouth washes from the first day of treatment and for at least a week. Mouth washes neutralize mouth acid and also get rid of any food debris left after brushing your teeth.

If necessary, the doctor will prescribe a pain-killer and appropriate treatment for the affected mucus to prevent possible risk of associated infection.

Some advice

- ▶ Brush your teeth gently, with a soft brush, at least after every meal.
- ▶ Choose a fluoride toothpaste.
- ▶ Follow up with a mouth wash. Roll the liquid around your mouth and then gargle for 1 minute.
- ▶ Use the bicarbonate solution proposed by your care team as a mouthwash or a mixture you can make up yourself: half to one teaspoonful of kitchen salt with half a teaspoonful of bicarbonate diluted in a litre of still water. Keep this mixture in the fridge and renew it every 24 hours.
- ▶ Repeat this treatment every time you eat or drink anything other than water, and whenever necessary for your comfort.
- ▶ Moisten your mouth as often as possible with regular mouthfuls of water or use a spray mist. Avoid using dental floss if it hurts or makes your gums bleed.

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With a prescription from your doctor, your chemist can prepare a mouth wash identical to the HUG's solution (which is reimbursed by the health insurance). The ingredients are as follows: 0.7 grs sodium bicarbonate, 0.45 grs sodium chlorate, 0.125 ml banana or strawberry flavouring, 100 ml distilled water.

Some advice

- ▶ Ban all mouth care products on the market that contain alcohol.
- ▶ Brush your tongue, if it is furred, with a soft toothbrush. If a whitish deposit persists, tell your doctor. It could be a sign of infection.
- ▶ Make sure that your dentures are not injuring you and have them altered if need be. To eliminate the risk of infection, a visit to the dentist is recommended just before you begin your treatment.
- ▶ In case of injury, drink through a straw for greater comfort.

With complementary prescriptions for anaesthetics, anti-fungal medication, antiseptics etc., use exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Don't hesitate to take the pain-killers you need.

Advice on what to eat

- ▶ Avoid tobacco and alcohol, which are highly irritating. If you smoke, a mouth wash after each cigarette may lessen the irritation.
- ▶ Give up food that is hard (bread crusts etc.), pungent (strong spices etc.), acid (tomatoes, lemon etc.) or sour (pickles etc.).
- ▶ Be careful with very sugary or salty foods as they are irritants.
- ▶ Choose semi-liquid foods or those containing juice (purees, meat with sauce, biscuits soaked in liquid) and calm irritation with ice cream, sherbet and other refreshing foods.

This card was translated by



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Ligue Suisse contre le cancer brochure, Difficultés alimentaires en cas de cancer [Food problems in cancer cases].



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