



## CANCER AND ORAL HEALTH

### Cancer treatments can cause oral side effects

If you are diagnosed with cancer, making your dentist and periodontist part of your cancer team can make you feel better and save your teeth as well as help make your cancer treatment as effective as possible. According to the National Institutes of Health, of the 1.2 million Americans diagnosed with cancer each year, about 400,000 will develop oral complications from their treatments. These complications may be quite painful and may affect compliance and even continuation of cancer treatment.

Common side effects of chemotherapy, radiation to the head and neck and bone marrow transplan-

tation include inflamed gums, mouth ulcers, infection, extensive cavities and dry mouth. Seeing a dentist or periodontist prior to cancer therapy is important so that oral problems that may complicate treatment can be identified and corrected.

Before, during and after cancer therapy, good oral hygiene is essential for improving comfort and reducing the risk of infection.

The following are tips to help keep your mouth as healthy as possible:

- Check your mouth daily for sores or other changes and discuss anything you find with your dental professional.

- Gently brush your teeth with an extra soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste twice a day unless your dental professional recommends otherwise. Soften bristles in warm water if brushing hurts.

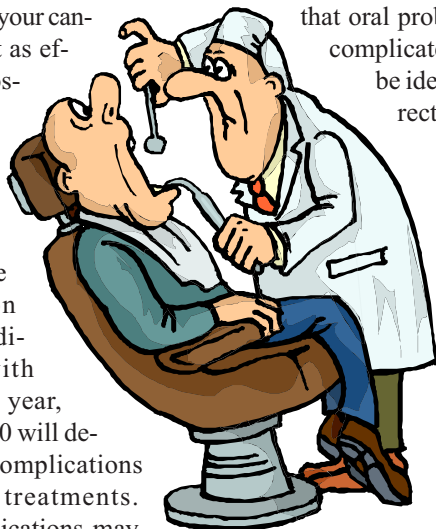
- Keep your mouth moist by sipping water often and using sugarless gum or candy to help stimulate saliva flow. Avoid mouthwashes containing alcohol that can further dry the mouth. Ask your dental professional about a subscription saliva stimulant.

- Floss gently every day, temporarily avoiding areas that are sore or bleeding.

- For a sore mouth, rinse a few times a day with one cup of warm water mixed with 1/4 teaspoon baking soda and 1/8 teaspoon salt. Follow with a plain water rinse.

- Avoid toothpicks (so you don't cut your mouth), tobacco products and alcohol.

- For more information, visit [www.nohic.nidcr.nih.gov/campaign/titlepg.htm](http://www.nohic.nidcr.nih.gov/campaign/titlepg.htm) ☒



### Detecting oral cancer early could save your life

More than 30,000 Americans are diagnosed with mouth and throat cancers each year. Oral cancer can affect any area of the oral cavity including the lips, gum tissues, cheek lining, tongue and the hard or soft palate. Despite treatment advances, approximately half of people who get oral cancer die within five years.

Like most cancers, early detection can dramatically improve a person's odds of survival. Therefore, any mouth sore that persists for more than a week should be examined by your dental professional. Other signs of oral cancer that you should watch for include:

- a sore that bleeds easily
- numbness or pain in the mouth

or lips or difficulty moving the jaw or tongue

- a color change of the oral tissue

- a lump, thickening rough spot, crust or small eroded area in the mouth

- a change in the way teeth fit together or loosening of the teeth.

The risk of oral cancer increases for people who use tobacco products and consume alcohol heavily. Smokers are six times more likely than nonsmokers to develop oral cancer. Smokeless tobacco increases the risk of cancers of the cheek, gums and lining of the lips

by about 50 times.

Age and sex also seem to play a role as most people who get oral cancer are males over age 40. Men are about twice as likely to get oral cancer as women.

You may be able to reduce the potential for oral cancer with a nutritious diet. Some research suggests that those who consume lots of fruits and vegetables have less oral cancer.

Regular visits to your dental professional can increase the chance that oral cancer will be detected in the early stages and treated effectively. ☒

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Call 1-800-FLOSS-EM for a free brochure on periodontal disease.

For more information visit [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org)