

Head and neck

Mouth care & general nutrition

This information is to be used in conjunction with the **My Treatment Booklet** and the **Head and neck** information sheet.

Good nutrition and oral health is very important during radiation therapy.

The main goals of nutrition during treatment are to maintain your current weight, prevent muscle loss and to help manage any symptoms that affect your eating and drinking. If you are better nourished, you will cope with treatment better, experience less side effects, and experience a better recovery.

Mouth care:

Be mindful of oral health and any change in saliva. Saliva makes it easier to chew and swallow, aids digestion, and helps prevent infection and tooth decay.

Self-care:

- *Rinse your mouth and gargle with a saline mouthwash after every meal and before bed. Increase the frequency of this as directed. Rinse and spit several times – do not swallow.*
Saline mouthwash: mix ¼ teaspoon of baking soda, ¼ teaspoon salt and 1 cup of warm water
- *If you use a different mouthwash check this is suitable as some are not recommended during treatment.*
- *Use high fluoride toothpaste e.g. Clinpro5000 as directed by your specialist dentist. This may need to be used long-term as you are at higher risk of oral cavities.*
- *Use a soft toothbrush if you do not already. Continue flossing unless this is causing discomfort.*
- *If you have dentures, clean these after each meal and before bed. As you progress through treatment you may consider limiting the time you wear them if it is uncomfortable.*
- *Check your mouth (including your tongue) daily. A member of the ARO team will also do this regularly.*
- *It is recommended to avoid alcohol and smoking.*

Advice for managing a dry mouth:

Self-care:

- *Sip fluids frequently (preferably sugar free). Have a water bottle wherever you go e.g. in the car, by your bed. You can flavour your water with sugar free options e.g. Waterdrops.*
- *You may like to try mouth moisturising products e.g. Oral 7 or Biotene mouthwashes, coconut oil, a homemade 50/50 spray e.g. mix water/canola oil, Xylimelts are convenient overnight, Xerostom pastels.*
- *Use lip balm (e.g. chapstick, vaseline) for dry lips.*

General nutrition:

Your energy and protein requirements increase during radiation therapy. Side effects of the treatment and some medications may make it difficult for you to eat and drink well. A dietitian will work with you week by week to help you through radiation treatment and can also help you manage your symptoms you may experience in conjunction with medications.

Self-care:

- *It is important to have good sources of protein:*
 - *Meat, chicken, fish, cooked seafood, eggs, plant based protein e.g. legumes (lentils, chickpeas), nuts.*
 - *Milk and milk alternatives e.g. milk, yoghurt, custard, ice cream, soy milk. Some plant based 'milks' are low in protein e.g. almond, rice, oat, coconut milk.*
- *Eat as well as you can (commercial foods may be convenient)*
- *As treatment progresses you may need to change the texture of your foods if it gets difficult to swallow and/or chew. You may need to have softer foods, or you may need to blend or puree your foods.*
- *Foods may require extra sauces or gravies if your mouth is dry. Foods such as bread may be difficult to chew/swallow.*
- *Use high protein supplement drinks or powders as needed and prescribed by your dietitian.*

To manage discomfort and pain

Radiation therapy to the head and neck is likely to cause you to experience pain in the mouth and/or throat. Pain is detrimental in a number of ways:

- Reducing ability to eat and sleep.
- Affecting mood.
- Increasing stress.
- Increasing the risk of interruption to your treatment.

These all have implications for the rate you heal and recover once treatment is completed.

Self-care:

- *We strongly advise you to discuss any discomfort as soon as it occurs, and follow the advice given by your team at ARO to minimise this.*

Self-care:

- *Visit Support Services on www.aro.co.nz for additional services before, during and after treatment.*