

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 recover better.

Mouth care:

You need to 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 = ¼ tsp of baking soda, ¼ tsp salt, 1 cup warm water.
- If you use a different mouthwash check it is ok as some are **not recommended during treatment like chlorhexidine mouthwash.**
- Use high fluoride toothpaste once a day in the evening e.g. Colgate Neutrafluor 5000. Continue to use long-term as you are at higher risk of oral cavities.
- Check your mouth (including tongue) daily. A member of the ARO team will also do this regularly.
- It is recommended to avoid alcohol and smoking.
- As you progress through treatment consider using a soft toothbrush if you don't already.
- If you have dentures, clean daily. As you progress through treatment you may consider limiting the time you wear them.

Tips for 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. If you don't like the flavour of water, you can add 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 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 with plenty of sauces or gravies (avoid biscuits, crackers, dry toast), or you may need to blend or puree your foods.*
- *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, as well as increasing the risk of interruption to course of treatment. These all have implications for the rate you heal and recover once the 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.*
- *Visit Support Services on **www.aro.co.nz** for additional services before, during and after treatment.*