

## IMPORTANCE OF MOUTH CARE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CANCER THERAPIES

Cancer treatments, including Radiation Therapy, Chemotherapy and Bone Marrow Transplant, may cause side effects that can affect the teeth, salivary glands and soft tissues in your mouth.

Sometimes, these side effects are severe enough to disrupt your cancer treatment schedules.

Regular visits to your Dentist can help minimise some of the side effects and ensure that recovery is as comfortable as possible.

This pamphlet contains useful information and tips that will help you cope better with the common oral side effects associated with your cancer therapies.

## DENTAL VISITS AND YOUR CANCER TREATMENTS

It is important to visit your Dentist at least two weeks before the start of any cancer therapy to prevent serious mouth problems that may occur during and after cancer therapies.

During the visit, your Dentist will perform a complete oral assessment that may include checking the health of your teeth, gums, soft tissues and saliva. He/She will also design a programme to restore and monitor the health of your mouth during and after the cancer therapies.

### YOUR 5-STEP ORAL ROUTINE DURING CANCER THERAPIES

In order to reduce the serious side effects that may occur in your mouth, it is important that you follow the simple 5-step oral routine.

**Look** into your mouth everyday for ulcers or any other changes in your mouth.

**Clean** in between your teeth gently at least once daily (flossing, using toothpicks or interdental brushing). If your gums bleed or are painful, seek advice from your Dentist.

**Brush** your teeth with a soft-bristled toothbrush for at least 90 seconds twice daily.

**\*Tip:** Soften the bristles by placing your toothbrush in hot water before use.

**Rinse** your mouth with an alcohol-free antibacterial mouthwash or salt-water rinse for 30 seconds after every meal or every four hours.

**\*Tip:** Salt-water rinse can be made by adding two teaspoons of salt to one litre of water, but must be discarded after 24 hours.

**Apply fluoride** to your teeth by brushing with mild tasting toothpaste with high fluoride content. Consult your Dentist for recommendations and use dental fluoride trays if recommended by your Dentist.

#### 5-step oral routine

1. Look into your mouth for changes.
2. Clean in between your teeth.
3. Brush your teeth for at least 90 seconds.
4. Rinse your mouth for 30 seconds.
5. Apply fluoride as directed.

### DENTURES

Avoid wearing dentures or ill-fitting dentures during your cancer therapies to prevent gum irritations.

If you are still wearing your dentures, perform the following two steps.

**Brush** your dentures twice daily for 90 seconds and soak them in a denture disinfectant.

**Rinse** the storage container for your dentures daily with water.

### TIPS ON COPING WITH COMMON ORAL SIDE EFFECTS OF CANCER TREATMENTS

#### Dryness of the mouth and lips

- Perform the 5-step oral routine daily, but increase the frequency of rinsing.
- Drink water more often to moisturise your mouth, unless advised otherwise. You can keep a water bottle with you at all times and take small sips from it.
- Suck on ice chips.
- If your saliva becomes thick, use salt and baking soda mouthwash.

**\*Tip:** Salt and baking soda mouthwash can be made by adding one teaspoon of baking soda and two teaspoons of salt to one litre of water. The solution must be discarded after 24 hours.

- Chew on sugar-less chewing gum or use saliva substitutes available from the pharmacy for temporary relief.
- Use non-petroleum based lip products to prevent dry and cracked lips.

#### Painful mouth and throat ulcers

- Continue your 5-step oral routine, but rinse with an alcohol-free antibacterial mouthwash or salt water. Rinse after every meal or every two to four hours. If your mouth is too sore and brushing your teeth hurts, you may wish to consult your Dentist.
- Take painkillers prescribed by the doctor.
- Avoid hard, spicy, hot, acidic or fried food.



### Difficulty in eating

Food that is watery or has softer consistency (e.g. gravy, porridge, oats, etc.) will make swallowing easier. Make sure the food does not contain too much sugar to avoid tooth decay in the long-term.

### Loss or change in taste

- Continue the 5-step oral routine and rinse before you eat.
- Experiment with different ways to cook your food.

### Fungal infections or oral thrush (white patches) in mouth

- Practise the 5-step oral routine consistently and do not skip any step. It helps to prevent harmful bacteria and fungi from building up in your mouth.
- Speak to your doctor to obtain medication to treat the infections.

### FUTURE DENTAL VISITS AND CANCER TREATMENTS

When you finish your cancer treatment, it is very important that you continue the 5-step oral routine and attend all follow-up visits arranged by your Dentist. This will ensure that any oral problems you may have can be quickly treated by your Dentist.



### LOCATION AND CONTACT DETAILS



### NATIONAL UNIVERSITY CANCER INSTITUTE, SINGAPORE (NCIS)

Outpatient Facilities	Level @ NUH MC
Radiation Therapy Centre	8
Breast Care Centre	8
Viva-University Children's Cancer Centre	9
Stem Cell Therapy Centre	9
Chemotherapy Centre	9
Cancer Centre	10

(65) 6773 7888\* (65) 6777 4413  
CancerApptLine@nuhs.edu.sg www.ncis.com.sg  
National University Cancer Institute, Singapore

CancerLine: Free, confidential counselling service  
(65) 9722 0569\* CancerLineNurse@nuhs.edu.sg

\*Mon - Fri (Except Public Holidays): 8.30am - 5.30pm



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MANAGING CANCER  
TREATMENT SIDE EFFECTS:  
TAKING CARE OF YOUR MOUTH