

Ms Teresa Costello

When undergoing cancer treatment each cancer patient will react differently and hence will need a customised oral hygiene regimen. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy have toxic effects on both normal and cancer cells. Our good cells will repair once treatment stops whereas the cancer cells should be stopped indefinitely. Taking this into account most dental issues should clear up also once treatment finishes.

These therapies affect different areas of the body. Chemo therapy impairs white and red blood cell formation as well as platelets. These cells help fight infection and protect us from diseases.

Some cancer treatments have 'stomotoxic' effects; this means they are specifically toxic to oral tissues. Your oncologist will advise you about this prior to commencing treatment.

Excellent oral hygiene is preferable before embarking on cancer treatment as pre-existing disease can complicate cancer treatment. So the idea is, visit your dentist before cancer treatment commences to manage existing dental issues and start preventive programs.

If, however, you have some urgent dental issues during treatment, the best time to come in for treatment /or cleaning is a few days prior to your scheduled chemotherapy day.

If you have been given a 'Chemo holiday' (a break from your chemotherapy time table) due to low blood cell count, please advise your dental surgery.

Chemotherapy:

Can cause **MUCOSITIS**, which is where the general lining of the mouth becomes damaged and inflamed. This can lead to multiple small and large ulcers arising.

GLOSSITIS or swelling and redness of the tongue is a common problem too.

These all clear up post cancer treatment but you will see how to deal with these issues below. Oral **INFECTIONS** can occur as your whole system will be immunosuppressed which means you are more prone to picking up infection. Thrush can be controlled with antifungal medication as can any other infection by appropriate medication. The oral tissues become more prone to damage and hence you should consider a soft diet during cancer treatment.

Radiotherapy:

Can cause **OSTEORADIONECROSIS**. This means that the bone surrounding any infected teeth can spontaneously die and become infected leading to premature loss of the compromised teeth and sometimes a good portion of the surrounding bone is also lost. It is not a pleasant issue and can be quite difficult to treat, especially during treatment. Remember no bone no teeth. Bone holds your teeth in place.

XEROSTOMIA is a very common side effect of this treatment. This is another word for dry mouth and can lead to a number of very irritating issues.

1. Dry mouths have a higher decay rate. Decay will occur more rapidly and easily in a dry mouth as there can be reduced/ no protective saliva to help keep the teeth clean and neutralise any acidic atmospheres. This means you may need many fillings after cancer treatment if not careful.
2. A dry mouth can also give rise to sores under any false/removable teeth you may have, as the denture will rub and graze the oral tissues if they are dry.
3. A dry mouth will also increase the likelihood of getting infections (ie thrush)
4. Halitosis is also a common side effect of a dry mouth . This means oral malodour.

Often times, from Cancer treatment, the jaws of the face will generally feel tight and need some exercises to deal with this. We refer to this tightness as TRISMUS

A comprehensive oral examination should occur at least a month prior to cancer treatment to allow for any healing that may need to occur. We will:

1. Treat existing dental decay and infection in the mouth
2. Eliminate or stabilise sites of potential infection
3. Extract teeth in radiation site, and nonrestorable, mobile teeth that may give rise to problems during cancer treatment.
4. Examine all dentures, crowns and bridges and ensure they are clean and adequate. Dentures should not be worn during treatment if possible. (And certainly not at night)
5. Clean teeth if necessary
6. Orthodontic brackets will be removed if highly stomotoxic therapy is to be used or if in line of radiation
7. Extraction of baby teeth that may be ready to be lost

We will prescribe an individualised oral hygiene regimen to minimise oral complications.

Use of supplemental fluoride will be initiated.

Regular visits to your local dentist are recommended during treatment.

At home regimen:

1. Brush teeth and gently clean your tongue with extra soft bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste after every meal and before going to bed. (Remember you can soften bristles in hot water.
2. Floss gently every day
3. Fluoride customised trays daily will be used before, during and after treatment. We recommend 0.4% stannous fluoride gel or 1.1 % neutral Sodium Fluoride. The gels are placed in trays and applied to teeth directly for 10/30 minutes a day. Do not overload trays as it is to be used topically only and by over filling you may end up ingesting some gel. The fluoride will stop sensitivity and new decay occurring. This may be a habit that you will have to continue for the rest of your life. You must attend your dentist to have these trays fabricated and the topical fluoride gel prescribed. They will also show you how much gel to place in the trays.
4. Rinse mouth with $\frac{1}{4}$ of baking soda, $\frac{1}{4}$ of salt and warm water several times a day to prevent dryness and help heal any sores. OMIT salt if suffering from ulcers or sores. Avoid alcohol mouthwashes
5. Avoid candy, spicy foods, tobacco and alcohol.
6. Used saliva substitutes if suffering from dry mouth..eg bio xtra gel
7. Use Difflam mouthwash (contains some topical anaesthetic) if sores and ulcers present
8. Occasionally ice chips/blocks being sucked can ease pain associated with certain cancer treatments. Your oncologist nurses will advise you of this if required.
9. Treat any aching facial muscles of the jaw with jaw exercises three times a day. We advise a series of opening the jaws as much as possible without causing pain 20 times. Do this three times a day.

We will be happy to guide you with regard to what dental products are necessary to purchase as would any local dental surgery. Please contact the surgery if you have any queries on the information provided on 012981801