Dietary advice for adults having radiotherapy or chemotherapy

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A dry or sore mouth during your treatment is not uncommon and is usually only temporary.

It is important that you mention any symptoms to your nurse or doctor so that you can get the treatment that is right for you.

The following tips may help until the symptoms have settled:

• Try eating small meals and snacks at regular intervals e.g. every two hours

• Sip fluids every few minutes. Drinking through a straw may help. Aim for 8 to 10 cups of fluid per day

• Cook all foods well. Meat and fish can be diced, minced or flaked and served with a sauce, gravy, butter or cream to moisten them. A sieve, liquidiser or masher can be used to make foods even softer if necessary

• Cold foods and drinks may be better than hot foods. Many can be prepared in advance and can be as nutritious as hot dishes

• Avoid crisps, dry toast or biscuits. ‘Dunking’ dry foods in drinks will make them easier to eat e.g. toast and biscuits

• Add crushed ice to drinks to soothe your mouth

• Avoid salty, spicy or acidic foods such as vinegar and citrus fruits e.g. orange, lemon, grapefruit

• Alcohol is best avoided; it may sting your mouth or cause your mouth to feel even drier

• Allow hot food to cool down before eating

• Cold foods such as plain yoghurt and ice cream may be soothing. Frozen ice pops and ice-lollies may also help
• Have fruit juices which are less acidic e.g. pear or peach juices, or dilute your usual fresh juice with water

• Eat at the times of day when you feel most well

• If you are not eating much, try nourishing drinks such as malted milk drinks, milky coffee or milk shakes

• Suck boiled sweets (unless you have been advised otherwise)

• Eat with a small spoon e.g. a teaspoon

• Use lip balm to keep lips moist. However, if you are having radiotherapy to the head or neck area, this may not be suitable for you. Ask your radiographer for advice before using any products on your lips

• Pay particular attention to oral hygiene

• If you wear dentures, make sure they fit properly

If your symptoms do not improve or you are losing weight, please ask your radiographer, nurse or doctor to refer you to the dietitian. Your doctor may be able to prescribe artificial saliva if your mouth is very dry.
Meal and snack ideas
The following is a helpful list of foods and drinks which may be suitable. Try to eat small amounts every two hours and remember to take sips of fluid regularly.

Breakfasts:

• Porridge with milk

• Scrambled or poached egg with soft bread or savoury muffin

Main meals:

• Soup with bread and margarine or butter

• Sandwich with meat, fish, cheese or egg and mayonnaise

• Cooked meat, fish, poultry (cooked in foil or poached)

• Lentils or pulses

• Mashed potatoes with grated cheese

• Cottage pie

• Risotto

• Pasta and cheese sauce

• Well-cooked mashed vegetables with added butter margarine or oil
**Snacks:**
- Fruit; stewed or mashed
- Boiled sweets
- Plain yoghurt

**Puddings:**
- Sponge and custard
- Rice pudding
- Mousse
- Ice cream
- Tinned fruit
- Trifle
- Egg custard

**Drinks:**
- Fruit squash
- Milk (full fat)
- Malted milk drinks, hot chocolate
- Complan, nutriment or supermarket own brand
- Smoothies
Sources of further information

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
The Patrick Room
Cancer Centre
Heritage Building
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TH
Telephone: 0121 697 8417

About this information

This guide is provided for general information only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Every effort is taken to ensure that this information is accurate and consistent with current knowledge and practice at the time of publication.

This information was produced by the QEHB Radiotherapy Dietitian.
Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.
The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4323.