



University Hospitals Birmingham
NHS Foundation Trust



Head and Neck Oncology Service

Building healthier lives

UHB is a no smoking Trust

To see all of our current patient information leaflets please visit
www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm

Care of your mouth and teeth before and after cancer treatment

Everyday advice

- Brush all surfaces of your teeth at least twice per day for two minutes each time with a fluoridated toothpaste. Avoid whitening toothpastes, which are harsh and abrasive. Brush teeth last thing at night and at least one other time during the day.
- It is better to brush your teeth before, rather than after meals. This reduces the plaque (bacteria) that has formed on your teeth overnight which will react with sugary food to make acid, which overtime weakens the enamel.
- Use a daily alcohol-free fluoride mouth rinse e.g. Fluorigard (daily 0.05% 225ppm fluoride). The rinse is available at chemists or supermarkets. Use at a different time to brushing with a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral that strengthens tooth enamel and can help prevent tooth decay.
- Chew sugar free gum, if possible, after meals and snacks for 10–15 minutes. This increases the production of saliva which helps wash away food particles and neutralise harmful acids which can weaken teeth and lead to tooth decay.
- Remember that water (not fizzy or flavoured), milk, tea, cheese and nuts are tooth-friendly food and drink snacks.
- Ensure you see a dentist or hygienist every 3–6 months who may apply fluoride varnish to strengthen your teeth.

Dry mouth information

Radiotherapy to the head and neck can affect the functioning of salivary glands leading to a reduction of saliva, causing a dry mouth, which can be permanent.

Chemotherapy can change the nature of saliva and the amount produced. This may be temporary with normal flow returning after treatment has been completed.

A dry mouth puts your teeth at higher risk of tooth decay, ask your dentist or doctor about using a **high-fluoride toothpaste** e.g. Duraphat toothpaste, which will help your teeth resist decay. This toothpaste is only available on prescription.

Patients with dry mouths are also more susceptible to gum disease, thrush and ulcers.

Dry mouth treatment

- Frequent sips of cold water/ice chips.
- Chewing sugar free gum can help some people who have non-functioning salivary glands to secrete saliva.
- Use water-based mouth moisturisers e.g. BioXtra oral gel or Oralieve mouth moisturising gel. A small amount of the gel needs to be massaged well into the soft tissues, it can be used on the lips, the cheeks, tongue, gums and the palate and even under dentures as many times as is beneficial. These can also be applied before and after mouth cleaning and before and after eating, which can make it less painful for patients with a severe dry mouth.

Please note:

- not all patients will find these effective;
- some gels may contain animal products or ingredients derived from egg or milk – please read the labels.

- Use of a mild-flavoured sodium lauryl sulphate free toothpaste, as it may cause less irritation to a dry mouth.

Sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) makes toothpaste foam but it can also have a drying effect on the mouth and should be avoided in patients who already have a dry mouth.

Brands of non-foaming (SLS free) toothpastes and their fluoride content:

• Sensodyne daily care gel	1450ppm
• Sensodyne daily care	1450ppm
• Oralnurse unflavoured toothpaste	1450ppm
• Sensodyne pronammel	1450ppm
• Retardex toothpaste	1000ppm
• Aquafresh children's little teeth	1400ppm
• Oralieve moisturizing toothpaste	1450ppm
• BioXtra toothpaste	1450ppm
• Biotene toothpaste	1450ppm

While you are having your radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy these products may be too harsh, the medical team will advise you on your oral care at these times.

The dental nurses are available in outpatient clinics to give oral care advice and support.

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