

# **Sore Mouth or Throat (Mucositis) Dry Mouth (Xerostomia) Oral Thrush (Candida)**

**Information for patients**



**Oxford Centre for  
Head and Neck Oncology**

This leaflet gives you some suggested remedies which previous patients have found helpful to help with a sore, dry mouth, caused by radiotherapy. Other products may be available from your chemist.

Some medications work well for one person and not for another. It is often a case of trying a product to see how it works for you. However, to know if something works or not, you need to use it as instructed for at least 3 days. Many of these products can be used together to get maximum benefit. For example, taking a painkiller and using a product inside your mouth may help.

Always start with good oral hygiene:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day with a soft toothbrush and a fluoride toothpaste (fluoride is important for maintaining strong teeth). You may be advised to use a different toothpaste than usual during radiotherapy treatment, which is gentle on sore or sensitive mouths but still helps to prevent dental plaque growth.
- Use a mild salt-water mouthwash (½ teaspoon of salt in a mug of water) after meals or supplement drinks.

## Help for a sore or ulcerated mouth

When you start to develop a sore mouth you may want to avoid alcohol, tobacco, spicy/dry foods, very hot or cold food and drinks, and salty or acidic foods (such as vinegar, citrus fruits, citrus drinks or curries).

### **Aspirin gargle/mouthwash**

Dissolve 300mg of aspirin in ½ a glass of water. Rinse around your mouth and spit out. Use this up to 8 times in 24 hours, half an hour before any meals. Check with your doctor or nurse if you can swallow the mixture. Dissolvable aspirin is available on prescription or can be bought over the counter at a chemist.

### **Painkillers**

A combination of painkillers can help. These will normally be prescribed by your doctor and may include paracetamol, ibuprofen and co-codamol. If you have been prescribed paracetamol or co-codamol, DO NOT take any other preparations containing paracetamol.

Always take pain medication regularly and before eating, drinking or doing any mouth exercises, as advised by the Speech and Language Therapist. You may need to think about the order you take your tablets, as ibuprofen needs to be taken with meals.

Check with your doctor, consultant or GP before taking any other medicine than those on your prescription. Painkillers are available on prescription, however some can be bought over the counter at a chemist.

### **Mucosal protector**

Gelclair is from a group of medications designed to protect the inside of your mouth and tongue. You will experience changes in the lining of your mouth during your radiotherapy treatment. Pain can occur when nerve endings are exposed; this is what happens with inflammation or ulceration.

The aim of this group of medications is to coat the inflamed/ulcerated areas in your mouth. This stops the nerve endings which are causing pain from being exposed. This will help to reduce your pain and make the inside of your mouth and tongue feel more comfortable.

Gelclair is an oral rinse which coats the surface of your mouth, forming a protective layer. It comes in individual 15ml sachets. Rinse it around your mouth for 1 minute. You must not eat or drink for 1 hour after using it, to allow it time to work. Gelclair can reduce pain and make your mouth more comfortable, helping you to eat and drink and providing relief for up to 7 hours.

## **After treatment**

### **Salivary stimulants**

These products are designed to stimulate the production of your own saliva. For example:

- **Sugar-free chewing gum**

Chewing gum stimulates the production of your own saliva and keeps your mouth feeling clean. Sugar-free brands that contain xylitol help protect your teeth from dental decay.

- **Sugar-free sweets**

These can help stimulate your own production of saliva, but if eaten in large quantities can have a laxative effect.

- **Saliva Stimulating Tablets (SST)**

These are tablets that dissolve slowly in your mouth. They are usually more useful after your radiotherapy has finished, when your tissues have healed.

They are available on prescription or over the counter at a chemist.

- Some people have commented that acupuncture has helped with their dry mouth.

## Help for a dry mouth (xerostomia)

Sip water regularly and carry a small bottle everywhere you go. You may find a small spray bottle filled with water to spray in your mouth helpful.

- **Saline (salt water) mouthwashes**

Saline solution stimulates your own salivary glands to produce more saliva, as well as also promoting good bacteria to help keep your mouth clean and debris free.

- **BioXtra**

The system includes an ultra mild alcohol and methol free mouthwash, toothpaste, gel spray and gel. These products supplement natural saliva, helping to maintain your mouth's natural balance and cleanse, refresh and lubricate your mouth.

These products can be prescribed for you during your radiotherapy treatment in the on treatment review clinics, or may be available to buy over the counter at a chemist.

Further details of online stockists can be found on the manufacturers website:

[www.bioxtra.co.uk](http://www.bioxtra.co.uk)

- **Biotene/Oralieve dry mouth relief**

These alternative products also help to protect your mouth against bad bacteria, whilst also stimulating the production of saliva. The Biotene system contains a moisturising mouthwash, fluoride toothpaste and moisturising gel. The Oralieve system contains an ultra mild toothpaste, moisturising mouth spray, moisturising mouth gel and an alcohol-free mouth rinse.

For further details on stockists of these products please check the relevant websites.

The Biotene system can be bought over the counter at a chemist or ordered from online retailers listed on the Biotene website.

Websites: [www.biotene.co.uk](http://www.biotene.co.uk) or <https://oralieve-direct.co.uk/>

## **Artificial saliva**

If you have had radiotherapy, artificial saliva products may help once you have recovered from treatment. Saliva replacements can be a spray or a lozenge, e.g. Glandosane, A.S. Saliva Orthana or Xerotin. It may have some benefit but only lasts for a short while. Artificial saliva is available on prescription or over the counter at a chemist; they may also sell their own-brand product.

## **Thrush (candida)**

It is common during and after radiotherapy to get a white coating on the inside of your mouth. This is caused by a fungal infection known as thrush (candida). Thrush can be painful and may affect your ability to eat and drink.

The medical team responsible for your care will be able to diagnose thrush and prescribe you treatment medication. The medication may be liquid or tablets, which you must take as prescribed. There are side-effects to these medications that can include diarrhoea and sickness. If you experience these side-effects please contact your medical team.

## **Prescriptions**

From April 2009, anyone with a cancer diagnosis is entitled to free prescriptions. If you have not yet applied for an exemption card, please see your GP, Advanced Nurse Practitioner or Cancer Specialist Nurse.

## **How to contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns, or need any further information, please contact your GP or telephone:

### **Head and Neck Cancer Specialist Nurses**

Tel: **01865 234 346**

(Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.00pm)

### **Radiotherapy Specialist Nurses**

Tel: **01865 235 472**

(Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 6.00pm)

### **Oncology Triage**

Tel: **01865 572 192**

(24 hours)

You will also be given the Head and Neck Cancer Team leaflet, which contains information on websites and support groups that you may find helpful.

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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