

Recommendations for Treating Oral Complications and Maintaining Oral Hygiene

A guide for patients undergoing treatments for head and neck cancers



Head and neck cancers (HNCs) are one of the most common cancer types, with an annual incidence of 550,000 cases worldwide¹

They are aggressive and progress rapidly, resulting in approximately 300,000 deaths annually¹



Treatment modalities for mouth cancers, categorised under HNC, which may be used independently or in combination, include¹:



Surgery



Radiotherapy



Chemotherapy



However, treatments can lead to oral complications and difficulties in practicing oral hygiene^{1,2}

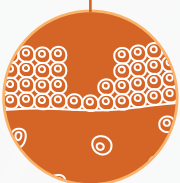


Oral complications can further impair the patient's quality of life^{1,2}



Therefore, an assessment by a dental professional is recommended to ensure optimal oral hygiene and minimise problems that may develop after cancer treatment^{1,2}

Causes of oral complications following radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy^{1,2}



Slow growth of cells in the oral tissues



Osteoradionecrosis or direct damage to the oral mucosa, salivary glands, and bones in the oral cavity



Slow healing of damaged tissues



Disturbed oral microbial populations

Common oral complications following cancer treatments^{1,2,3}



Treatment-related



Side effect-related



Chronic (long-lasting)



Acute (short-term)



Difficulty in talking, eating, and swallowing



Salivary gland problems



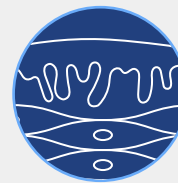
Pain



Hyposalivation or xerostomia



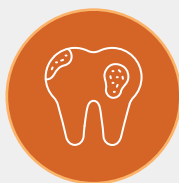
Change in taste



Tissue fibrosis



Mucositis (inflamed mucous membranes in the mouth)



Tooth decay



Malnutrition and dehydration



Infection



Gum disease

Preventive measures prior to initiating chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy^{1,2,3}

Maintain good oral hygiene



Have regular dental check-ups

Remain hydrated



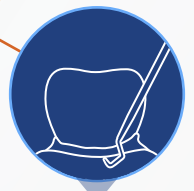
Fix oral problems, such as cavities, broken teeth, loose crowns/fillings, and gum disease, that can aggravate after cancer treatment

Quit smoking



Use fluoroprophylaxis for tooth decay prevention

Maintain a healthy diet



Seek routine professional dental hygiene services



Brushing

- Use a manual or electric toothbrush with soft bristles
- Oscillating-rotating electric toothbrushes reduce gingivitis and remove plaque better than sonic electric toothbrushes⁵
- Use fluoride toothpaste with a mild taste
- Clean the brush with warm water and keep it dry between uses



Rinsing

- Rinse with saltwater and/or baking soda² every 2 hours
- Use an antibacterial rinse after brushing
- Mouthwash with 0.12% chlorhexidine



Interdental cleaning

- Floss gently once a day
- Brush gently with an interdental brush



Denture care

- Clean dentures every day with a soft bristle toothbrush
- Keep dentures immersed in water when not in use



Low-level laser therapy is recommended for the treatment of oral mucositis



Zinc supplements are recommended for wound healing



Apply ice for pain relief



Non-sugar chewing gums can induce saliva secretion and counter dry mouth

Populations that require special care



Geriatric patients



Immunocompromised individuals



Patients with physical and mental disabilities



Patients with multiple comorbidities

Challenges

! Limited mobility

! Require assistance

! Lack of adequate access to oral healthcare services

! Lack of awareness

! Scarcity of disability-trained dental professionals

Treatment considerations



Schedule regular dental check-ups



Educate patients and their caregivers regarding dental care practices and precautions



Make individualised dental care more accessible



Improve means of communication

Speech therapist

Dietician

An interdisciplinary team should collaboratively decide upon a preventive and therapeutic treatment plan that can minimise the impact of oral complications on patients with HNC²

Cancer specialist

Dental professional

Key messages

- ! Educating patients about the effects of surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy on oral health can help them adopt preventive measures
- ! Prophylactic treatments can help minimise the impact of all aspects of cancer treatment on oral health
- ! The type and magnitude of oral complications must be taken into consideration while devising a treatment strategy

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