



Breast cancer

5 ways to protect your mouth during breast cancer treatment

If you are in treatment for breast cancer, you may find that your mouth needs a little TLC. Dentists recommend this oral care program to keep your teeth and gums at their best:

Brush gently and often. Brush your teeth and your tongue with an extra-soft toothbrush after every meal and at bedtime. If your mouth is sore, soften the bristles in warm water.

Floss once a day. If your gums bleed or hurt, avoid the areas that are tender, but floss your other teeth.

Keep your mouth moist. Rinse often with water. Don't use mouthwashes containing alcohol. Use a saliva substitute to help moisten your mouth.

Eat and drink with care. Choose easy-to-chew foods. Protect your mouth from spicy, sour or crunchy foods. Go for lukewarm foods and drinks instead of hot or icy-cold. Avoid alcohol.

Try to quit tobacco. Ask your cancer care team to help you stop smoking or chewing tobacco.

Sources: National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Nursing Research, CDC, Friends of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

Trivia time:

Why do some cancer treatments change your sense of taste?

Answer: Chemotherapy attacks cells that multiply quickly because that's how cancer grows. Unfortunately, taste buds grow the same way, so chemotherapy destroys them, too.

Changes in your mouth? Let your cancer care team know

Women in treatment for breast cancer may also develop oral health issues such as cavities, infections, dry mouth and gum disease. These conditions may complicate your treatment plans, so it's important to let your cancer care team know of any mouth problems.

Take a moment each day to check how your mouth looks and feels. Call your care team when:

- > You first notice a mouth problem
- > An old problem gets worse
- > You notice any changes you're not sure about

Sources: National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Nursing Research, CDC, Friends of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

To best fight cancer, your team should include a dentist

Oral health issues have the potential to delay cancer treatment. Your treatment may go more smoothly if you consult your dentist, ideally about a month before you begin treatment.

Working with your dentist throughout your treatment also will help protect your mouth, teeth and jaw bones from damage that may be caused by radiation and chemotherapy.

As you make a treatment plan, remember: Your doctor is just the beginning of your care team.

Sources: National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Nursing Research, CDC, Friends of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research