Caring for Your Mouth

This handout will give you information on how to care for your mouth. Good mouth care is important to keep your mouth healthy. It will help to prevent problems while you are having treatment.

What you can do:

1. **Brush your teeth**
   - Use a small, ‘ultra’ soft toothbrush.
   - Use toothpaste that has fluoride in it.
   - Brush your teeth 4 times a day after meals and before you go to bed.
   - Rinse your toothbrush before using it to soften the bristles.
   - Brush your tongue gently from back to front.
   - Get a new toothbrush when the bristles on your toothbrush do not stand up.
   - If your gums bleed for more than 2 minutes, stop brushing. You may need to clean your teeth and gums with a foam swab. You can buy foam swabs at a medical supply store.

2. **Floss your teeth (only if you already floss your teeth)**
   - Floss your teeth at least once a day.
   - Use floss that is waxed.
   - If flossing makes your gums bleed for more than two minutes, stop flossing.

3. **If you have dentures**
   - Take your dentures out before you brush them.
   - Brush and rinse your dentures after meals and at bedtime.
   - Remove your dentures overnight. Soak them in a mouth rinse (see below).

4. **Rinse your mouth**
   - Rinse your mouth (rinse, swish and spit) after you brush your teeth or take out your dentures. You can also do this as needed if your mouth is dry or uncomfortable.
   - To make up a mouth rinse use 15ml (1 tsp) salt or 15ml (1 tsp) baking soda in 1L (4 cups) of water. Store this mouth rinse in a covered container.
   - You can use this mouth rinse if your mouth feels dry or uncomfortable.
   - Do not use mouthwash that has alcohol in it.
5. Moisturize your mouth
   - You can moisturize (wet) your mouth with water or by rinsing with the mouth rinse above.
   - You can buy an artificial saliva product from your local pharmacy. Ask your pharmacist about this.
   - Rinse between meals with the mouth rinse above.

6. Caring for your lips
   - Keep your lips moist so they do not get chapped.
   - Use a lubricant (lip balm) that is water soluble or made from lanolin or oil based.
   - Apply the lubricant (lip balm) to your lips after you clean your mouth/brush your teeth and at bedtime. You can also put it on your lips when they feel dry and chapped.

If you have any questions or concerns about your appetite or diet, please ask any member of your healthcare team to refer you to a dietitian.

Call your nurse at the Cancer Centre if:
   - Your mouth is sore and you are not able to brush your teeth.
   - You see any sores in your mouth or around your mouth.
   - You see any white patches in your mouth.

Go to the emergency department at the hospital closest to you if:
   - You have a fever above 38.3° C/100.9°F at any time or above 38.0° C/100.4°F for more than an hour
   - Your gums will not stop bleeding
   - You are having trouble swallowing

Please talk to any member of your health care team if you have questions or if you do not understand any of the information in this handout. Your nurse will have given you a card with the number for you to call between the hours of 8:30am and 4:00pm from Monday to Friday. The Cancer Centre is closed on weekends and holidays.

For more information about how you can manage your symptoms, go to Cancer Care Ontario’s website found at: [www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms](http://www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms).

Reference:

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