



# NYUCancerInstitute

**Questions?** Please call **212-731-5003**. If it's not during business hours you will be connected to the answering service and the radiation physician on call will help you.

## **How to Lessen Discomfort during Head and Neck Radiation Therapy**

Once **Radiation therapy** begins, you may have side effects. These side effects may increase during your treatment, but will gradually get better once the therapy is finished. Your doctor will explain the side effects you are most likely to have.

To lessen your discomfort, it is important to follow these instructions.

### **Sore Mouth and / or Throat:**

- Do **Not** smoke or chew tobacco.
- Do **Not** drink alcoholic or carbonated beverages and avoid caffeine.
- **Drink** large amounts of liquid every day:
  - At least 6 to 8 eight ounce glasses of water.
  - Do not drink very hot or cold liquids.
  - Do not eat spicy, acidic or highly seasoned foods.
  - Room temperature or lukewarm liquids are easiest to swallow.
  - Do not drink soda or citrus juices (orange or grapefruit juice).
  - Drink liquids high in vitamins, calories, and proteins, such as oral supplements (*Ensure, Boost, Enlive*) and *Gatorade*.
- Eat nourishing, soft, moist foods.
  - Eat small portions several times a day instead of 3 large meals.
  - Do not eat firm, sharp edged foods, such as pretzels, potato chips, bacon, celery, toast and nuts.
  - Do not eat very hot or cold foods.
- You can take a multivitamin once a day. **Do not** take large doses of vitamins A, C, or E. You should check with your doctor about using any other medicines or treatments.
- If you have teeth, you must see your dentist. Have all dental work done and fluoride dental trays made before radiation therapy begins.
  - Fluoride treatments can begin with radiation therapy. If your mouth becomes sore the fluoride treatments will be put off until radiation therapy is finished and /or your mouth sores have healed.
- **Do Not** wear dentures during your treatment. Visit your dentist when treatment is over. He will tell you when you can start wearing your dentures again. He will also make sure they fit well.



# NYUCancerInstitute

**Questions?** Please call **212-731-5003**. If it's not during business hours you will be connected to the answering service and the radiation physician on call will help you.

- **Daily Mouth Care** should include rinsing and gargling 4-6 times daily. Make sure you do this after eating and at bed time with this mix:  
1tsp salt and 1 tsp baking soda mixed in 1 quart of warm water.

Brush your teeth 3-4 times a day using non-abrasive fluoride toothpaste.

- **Do Not** use any mouthwash or lozenges unless ordered by your physician.
- If swallowing is painful or your mouth becomes very sore, ask your doctor what medications you can take.

## **Thickened Saliva And Dry Mouth:**

After several weeks of treatment, your saliva may become thick and your mouth may become dry. It will take 3 to 6 weeks after therapy is finished for these conditions to improve. Until then:

- Use a cool air humidifier or vaporizer in your main living area during the day and in your bedroom at night. If you don't have a humidifier or vaporizer, you can let a warm shower run with the bathroom door closed and inhale the steam.
- Chew sugarless gum and suck sugarless candy.
- Drink 6 to 8 eight ounce glasses of fluid daily. Carrying a small bottle of water with you when you leave home is a good idea.
- You can buy saliva substitutes from the drugstore without a doctor's prescription. They may be used before meals and at bedtime.

## **Taste Change:**

After several weeks of treatment, you may temporarily lose your sense of taste. It will begin to return 3 to 6 weeks after treatment ends. Until then:

- It is very important to eat well balanced meals. **Do not lose weight**, even if all food tastes alike or has no taste.
- Eat more fish, poultry, eggs, cheese or milk products if you cannot eat meat, since your response to the taste of meat can change.
- Eat foods that are a little chilled, such as milkshakes and jell-o. Foods put through a blender may be easier to eat.
- Use plastic forks and plastic spoons.



# NYUCancerInstitute

**Questions?** Please call **212-731-5003**. If it's not during business hours you will be connected to the answering service and the radiation physician on call will help you.

## **Hoarseness:**

- **Do not strain your voice** during and for several months after treatment.
- Gargling with warm salt water can be soothing.

## **Skin Care:**

- Marks on the skin are needed for the correct positioning of treatment and **must not be washed off**. If you have tattoo marks, these marks will not wash off.
- You may gently wash the treated area once a day. Use plain water and a very mild soap (i.e. Dove, Basis). Pat the skin dry. **Do not rub the skin. Do not use talcum powder**. Do not scratch the skin in the areas where you are receiving radiation.
- **Do not** use creams, soaps, ointments, lotions, perfumes, makeup or medicines on the treated area. On your 1<sup>st</sup> day of radiation therapy, you will be given Radio-Gel/SAFE Gel. You can begin using this **after** you receive your 1st treatment. **Do not** use alcohol or peroxide on the treated skin.
- **Do not** wear tight clothing that can rub the treatment area. Shirts, blouses or scarves should be soft and should not be starched. Do not wear wool next to the skin being treated.
- **Do not** wear jewelry on or around the treated area.
- **Do not** use heating pads or ice packs in the treated area at any time during treatment.
- **Do not** shave in the treated area. Use only an **electric razor**. Do not use lotion before or after shaving.
- **Do not** leave the treatment area open to long periods of sunlight.
- If your other doctors have given you any instructions which are different from those above, please discuss them with the radiation therapy nurse, nurse practitioner or doctors.
- **Always feel free** to ask questions or report symptoms.

**\* Plan to stay longer once each week for an exam to see your response to treatment.**