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to report any
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ulcers to your
doctor or nurse.*

Avoiding Mucositis (Mouth Sores)

Mucositis is the breakdown of mucous membranes, causing painful sores and ulcers. It occurs most often in the mouth, but also can occur in your throat and stomach. Use these 4 easy steps to help reduce your chance of getting mucositis.

Step 1: Understand the Risk Factors

Risk factors include:

- Poor oral hygiene
- Alcohol or tobacco use
- Dentures
- Poor nutrition/dehydration
- Older age
- Low neutrophil or white blood cell (WBC) count
- Chemotherapy
- Radiation therapy to the head or neck area

Step 2: Take an Active Role in Checking Your Mouth

- Note any changes in voice, taste and ability to eat or swallow.
- Perform an oral check once a day. Use a small flashlight or go to an area that has bright light.
 - Look at your lips, tongue, saliva, gums, teeth, lining of your mouth. Any changes?
 - If you have dentures (full or partials that come out), remove them before your oral check.

Report to your doctor or nurse any moisture changes, white spots, ulcers, lesions, redness, swelling or pain.

Step 3: Perform Proper Oral Hygiene

Brushing

- Use a soft toothbrush to prevent bleeding. Gently brush your teeth and tongue at least twice a day for about 1½ minutes. Make sure to brush the hard-to-reach areas and also brush your gums.

Rinsing

- Use the mouth rinses suggested by your doctor at least 4 times a day. Make sure after each meal you wash away any food left between your teeth and gums.
- If you have dentures, remove them before rinsing your mouth.
- Soak dentures (full or partials that come out) overnight and clean and rinse well before putting them back in your mouth.
- Remove dentures if they are making your mouth sore.

Flossing

- Gently floss once a day.
- Do not floss if your gums are bleeding or your platelet count is below 20,000.

Lip Care

- Keep your lips moist. Use products such as ChapStick®, Vaseline®, and Aquaphor® to prevent drying and cracking.
- Keep your mouth moist. Drink lots of liquids during the day.

Step 4: Tips for Eating

- Avoid sharp, hard, coarse, hot, spicy and acidic foods, such as tortilla chips, chili, orange juice, and tomatoes.
- Try to eat a diet high in protein such as dairy, poultry, meats and fish. Nutrition supplements such as Boost® can be added to your diet.
- Avoid citrus juices (such as orange or grapefruit).
- Eat soft foods such as applesauce, custard, cottage cheese, scrambled eggs, gelatin; and, if allowed, low-acid fruits, such as watermelon, bananas and cantaloupe.
- If sores cause discomfort, take pain medicine about 1 hour before eating.
- Keep your mouth moist – sip water throughout the day. Suck on ice chips or sugar-free candy, or chew sugar-free gum.

Ask your doctor or nurse about saliva substitutes if your mouth is always dry.

We are Here to Help if You Develop Mucositis

- Remember to report any changes or ulcers to your doctor or nurse.
- Ask your doctor for pain medication.
- The staff can help with special requests and needs. Just ask the doctor, nurse or dietitian.

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

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