

Mouthcare

Mucositis

This is when the mouth is inflamed and painful. Your child may also have ulcers or any of the other symptoms listed below. Managing mucositis may require hospital admission to ensure adequate pain relief, fluid intake and mouthcare.

Some children receiving chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy will develop a sore mouth. Side effects can cause pain, infection, inflammation or ulceration of the mouth lining (mucositis). Mouth hygiene is important as this will help reduce infection.

Dental check-ups

It is important to have a check-up by your usual dentist soon after diagnosis and at least every four months during treatment. The dentist must be aware of your child's diagnosis and treatment. Dental treatment may need to be planned in relation to chemotherapy and blood count.

After treatment finishes, regular check-ups should continue.

Mouth hygiene during and between chemotherapy

- Brush your child's teeth four times a day with fluoride toothpaste and a soft toothbrush (especially if susceptible to a sore mouth).
- Change the toothbrush every month or following a mouth infection.
- Use lip balm to protect the lips from dryness.
- Additional aids such as flossing or fluoride supplements should only be used with advice from your hospital doctor and dentist.
- The use of Caphosol as a mouthwash can be helpful in preventing mouth ulcers. This can be obtained from your GP.

Symptoms to look for

Any signs of a sore mouth or infection should be reported to your doctor or nurse. To help identify potential problems the mouth should be examined daily. Parents should look for:

- Sores, ulcers or pain
- Cold sores
- Bleeding within the mouth i.e. gums
- White spots or coating to the tongue.

Thrush (Candidiasis)

This is a type of fungal infection which looks like white patches on the tongue or inside the cheeks. These can spread to the throat, and may lead to pain and difficulty in swallowing. Tell your doctor or nurse so the appropriate medication can be prescribed.

Cold sores (Herpes Simplex)

A cold sore is a viral infection that commonly causes blisters (cold sores) on the lips or in the corners of the mouth. If a cold sore develops, your child will need a course of medication to clear the infection. Cold sores are highly contagious. If you or other members of your family suffer from them, tell your doctor or nurse so the appropriate medication can be prescribed.

Caring for a child with a sore mouth or throat at home

Ensure pain relief is given regularly – it may be helpful to give it before meals. Also using a local anaesthetic spray (Difflam) prior to eating may help numb the mouth and throat, making eating less painful. If the condition of your child's mouth or throat prevents them from eating or drinking, please tell your doctor or nurse as they may require admission to hospital for pain relief and/or intravenous fluids.

Drinking will help to prevent the mouth lining from becoming dry.

Eating soft foods that require less chewing (mashed potato, yoghurts, ice cream) may help prevent discomfort. Avoid citrus fruits and juices, as these may hurt.

Please speak to your doctor, nurse or community nurse if you have any questions.