

Eating Tips for Sore Mouth and Throat

For patients who have soreness in the mouth and throat during cancer treatment

This pamphlet covers:

- Foods to avoid and foods to try
- Simple ways to make it easier to chew and swallow
- How to manage pain that happens with chewing and swallowing



Some cancers and cancer treatments can cause a sore mouth and throat which can make it difficult to eat and drink. Changing the texture of foods and avoiding certain foods and liquids can make it easier to eat and drink. Focusing on high calorie and high protein foods can also help.

Simple ways to make it easier to chew and swallow

- Cook foods until soft and tender (such as vegetables, rice, pasta, potatoes).
- Cook foods, such as meats, in liquids to help make them more moist and soft.
- Soften foods by soaking in soup or milk or dunking in warm beverages (such as cereal in milk, crackers in soup, and cookies in warm milk).
- Chop, mash, grind or blend foods with extra liquid (such as mashed potatoes with butter and milk, ground meat with gravy, blended fruit with cream).
- Add grated cheese or silken tofu to cooked vegetables, soups and casseroles.
- Drink extra liquid with each bite of food if your mouth is dry.
- Eat or drink foods and liquids that are at room temperature if hot or cold temperatures hurt.
- Use a straw to drink if you have sores in your mouth. This can help direct the liquids past the sores. Do NOT use a straw if your health care team has asked you to avoid them for safety reasons.

Foods to try

- Mix canned or flaked meat or fish with extra mayonnaise, cream soup or sauce.
- Try ready-made infant foods. The pureed meats will add extra protein. You can eat these on their own, or add them to soups and casseroles.
- Make scrambled eggs and omelettes with full fat milk or other milk alternatives such as soy or canned coconut milk. Add cheese for extra calories and protein.
- Add a beaten egg to broth or soup while it is cooking.
- Add skim milk powder to foods for extra protein. You can stir it into a soft dish, stews, soups, smoothies or other liquids. You can usually find it in the baking aisle of a grocery store.
- Choose full fat cottage cheese and yogurt.
- Make stews with soft cooked meat, beans or lentils with added potatoes, rice or noodles.
- Add soft or silken tofu to soups, stir-fries, noodle bowls/dishes, salads and casseroles for extra protein. You can also try the pre-made individual tofu desserts for snacks.
- Add canned coconut milk to soups, mild or non-spicy curry dishes or use when cooking fish, tofu or chicken with your preferred seasonings.

Foods to avoid

Avoid these foods ONLY if they start to cause you pain:

- Crusty bread or toast and coarse cereals such as granola
- Dry snack foods such as potato chips, pretzels, nuts and popcorn
- Raw vegetables and hard fruits
- Citrus fruits and juices (like oranges, grapefruits, lemons)
- Acidic foods such as fresh or canned tomatoes, tomato juice, salad dressings, pickles and vinegar
- Very spicy foods and condiments such as pepper, chili, hot sauces and barbecue sauce
- Tough, dry meat
- Fried foods
- Alcoholic beverages

Fluids are important

Frequent, small sips of fluids throughout the day will help keep you hydrated and will also keep your mouth and throat moist. Most people need 8 – 10 cups (2 – 2.5 litres) every day. Drink fluids at cool or room temperature if your mouth or throat is sensitive.

Good choices that have protein and calories are:

- Hot chocolate, lattes or smoothies made with milk or soy beverage
- Full fat milk, milkshakes and smoothies
- Soy beverages
- Nutritional drinks (such as Carnation Breakfast Essentials, Ensure, Boost, Rumble)

Good choices that have calories are:

- Fruit crystal drinks like Kool-Aid
- Low acid juice such as grape, or fruit nectar drinks such as peach or pear
- Sodas like ginger ale. Have them flat so that the carbonation doesn't irritate your mouth and throat.
- Iced tea
- Gatorade
- Soups

Other choices of fluids that hydrate, but provide minimal calories or protein are:

- Water
- Broth
- Tea or coffee. Increase calories in coffee and tea by adding cream or lots of warm milk to make a latte.

How to keep your mouth clean and moist

- Rinse your mouth with baking soda, salt or **flat** club soda when you wake up in the morning and often throughout the day. This will also help to remove saliva that has become thick and ropey during treatment.

Baking Soda and Water

1. Dissolve 1 level teaspoon of baking soda in 2 cups (500 ml) water.
2. Stir until the baking soda is dissolved.

Salt and Water

1. Dissolve 1 level teaspoon of salt in 2 cups (500 ml) of warm water.
2. Stir until the salt is dissolved

Baking Soda, Salt and Water

1. Dissolve ½ level teaspoon of baking soda and ½ level teaspoon of salt in 2 cups (500 ml) of water.
2. Stir until the baking soda and salt are dissolved.

Flat Club Soda

1. Open any brand of store-bought Club Soda.
2. Leave it open until the soda is “flat” or no longer fizzes (the bubbles are gone).

- After making your rinse, store the rinse in a container and cover. Always make and use new mouth rinse every 24 hours. Old mouth rinse is less helpful and may contain bacteria.
- Avoid using mouthwashes that contain alcohol. The alcohol can hurt or dry your mouth.
- Use a room humidifier or vaporizer (especially at night).
- Ask your pharmacist if it would be helpful to use ‘artificial saliva’ (like Oral Science or BioXtra products).

How to manage pain that happens with chewing and swallowing

- There are special mouthwashes that can be used before meal times to numb the mouth or throat. Ask your health care team.
- Pain medications can be matched with your mealtimes to make it easier to eat. Ask your health care team how to manage pain around meal times.

- If it is difficult to swallow pills, ask if the medication is available as a liquid or if the pills can be crushed and mixed with pureed fruit, ice cream or pudding.

Helpful resources at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

- Other resources available at the Patient & Family Library “Adding Calories and Protein to Your Diet” pamphlet
- “Goes Down Easy: Recipes to Help you Cope with the Challenge of Eating During Cancer Treatment” cookbook
 - Find a copy at the Patient & Family Library
 - Download a free copy at <https://thepmcf.ca/goesdowneasy/index.html>
 - Order a hard copy (see online booksellers such Chapters or Indigo or visit your local bookstore)

To search online for these and other helpful resources, go to:

- www.theprincessmargaret.ca
 - Click on “Patients and Families” on the blue menu bar
 - Scroll down and click on “Search the Library”
- www.ellicsr.ca/en/clinics_programs/ellicsr_kitchen
 - Click on “Recipes by Side Effects” on the left sided tool bar
 - Scroll down and select “Sore Mouth or Throat and Swallowing Problems” for soft recipes

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