

MUCOSITIS

Mucositis is painful inflammation of the GI tract, often causing sores in the mouth and throat. It affects the tongue, gums, and roof of the mouth. Inflammation of the intestines and rectal area can also occur. It is caused by chemotherapy (CT) and radiation therapy (RT). CT and immunotherapy cause a whole-body effect, and RT will cause a local effect in the treatment fields.

The severity of mucositis can vary from simple redness to severe sores inside the mouth. More severe cases can cause significant pain requiring interruptions in treatment or even treatment discontinuation. It can increase risk for mouth infections and also cause nutrition issues for you.

Mucositis can be caused by chemotherapy (CT) and radiation therapy (RT). Redness can begin 3-4 days after treatment. This will usually peak within the 7-14 days after treatment.

For patients who are receiving RT for head and neck cancers, the redness will usually start after the first week of treatment and get progressively worse as you continue your treatment. This cumulative damage may cause pain. Severe mucositis can include thick secretions that make it difficult for you to swallow even your own saliva, causing coughing and choking, and difficulty eating, drinking, and speaking. You may need medications to help with the pain.

CAUSES OF MUCOSITIS, AND FACTORS THAT PUT YOU AT HIGHER RISK ARE:

- High dose chemotherapy
- Chemo and radiation combined therapy
- Certain chemotherapy medications
- Radiation therapy for head and neck cancers
- Pretherapy weight loss that is unintentional
- Smoking or alcohol use
- Decreased kidney function
- Poor oral hygiene

Your doctor or nurse will ask you about your nutritional intake, any trouble with swallowing or coughing while trying to eat, and oral hygiene. Please let us know if you have any muscle wasting, loss of subcutaneous fat, and report any weight loss. Your weight will be checked at every visit. If you are given pain medications to help treat mucositis and they are not working, please make sure to talk with your doctor

or nurse. The prescription may need to be adjusted as you continue treatment.

You will also be asked about whether you are eating with family and friends or alone? Does it take you longer to eat than usual, or are you not eating at all? The isolation of eating alone can cause anxiety and depression.

SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU MANAGE THE DISCOMFORT DURING THIS TIME ARE:

- Perform good oral hygiene
- Get a dental exam prior to starting treatment
- Avoid spicy foods
- Avoid hard or crunchy foods
- Avoid very hot food or drinks

Some patients may need prescribed mouthwashes to get some temporary relief to eat. You can also use a homemade mouthwash by combining 1 cup of warm water with 1/8 tsp of salt and 1/4 tsp baking soda. This can be used to rinse and spit multiple times a day and a new solution should be made daily.

Please make sure to discuss any mouth discomfort you may be having after starting treatment with your healthcare team. There are ways we can help you manage this side effect throughout treatment.