# **CHEM Center for Radiation Oncology**

## **Side Effects and Care during Treatment**

The side effects of your radiation therapy have been explained to you by your radiation oncologist. Listed below are the more common side effects that you may experience during your treatment.

Therapy to the head and neck area causes a number of side effects, which are unpleasant. Some side effects are temporary and will disappear after your treatment is complete. Some effects of the therapy will become pronounced in the month following the end of your therapy. Some effects of the therapy could be permanent. Your doctor and nurse will discuss the side effects in detail with you. Listed below are some common side effects of your treatment.

- Thickened or lack of saliva and loss of taste.
- Sore throat and hoarseness. In addition to the skin in the treated are becoming reddened, dry and itchy, you will experience a very sore throat. Your voice may become hoarse.
- Swallowing problems and weight loss. Because the radiation will cause soreness, dry mouth and other changes in your body, eating can be difficult and you could experience weight loss. The following hints will help you deal with these side effects.

#### For sore throat and mouth:

- Eat soft, cold foods such as canned fruits, ice cream, sherbet, popsicles, Italian ice and gelatin.
- Avoid certain spices if they bother you (especially those that contain chili powder or pepper).
- Avoid highly acid foods such as citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes and tomatoes).
- Try fruit juices and drinks to see which ones are soothing to your taste (peach, pear, apricot nectars are good selections)
- Use a straw or tilt your head back for more comfortable swallowing.
- Keep beverages cool.

### For dry mouth from lack of saliva:

**HEAD and NECK** 

- Take a swallow of your beverage with each bite of food.
- Try sugarless hard candy to help stimulate saliva production.
- Sip liquids frequently during the day.
- Eat liquid or moist foods
- Try "dunking" foods in liquid

## If swallowing becomes difficult:

- Try eating liquids or pureed foods.
- Formula supplements may be beneficial to try.
- Stay away from very thick or sticky foods that may be difficult to swallow (such as peanut butter).

### Taste changes:

- Marinate meats in teriyaki or soy sauce, sweetened fruit juice, wine or dressing before cooking.
- Try eating protein foods cold or at room temperature (canned tuna, ham or chicken; individual cheese slices, puddings, custards, ice cream, milk shakes)
- If you have a distaste for meat, you may be able to use dairy products or vegetable sources of protein.
- Extra salt may improve the taste of foods (if you are not on a salt restricted diet).
- Use plastic utensils, if your food tastes metallic.
- You may want to try highly seasoned foods such as pizza, chili, or lasagna. Use catsup or other seasonings on bland foods until your taste returns unless you found that highly spiced food bothers you.
- Acidic foods, such as lemonade and orange juice, may stimulate the ability to taste. Try these at the start of your meals unless you have a sore throat and/or mouth.

It is important to get as many calories as you can while you are being treated. This is <u>not</u> the time to restrict your diet. EAT WHAT YOU LIKE, WHAT YOU CAN, AND WHEN YOU CAN.

# Dental problems.

Teeth are effected by loss of saliva and poor hygiene relates to mouth irritation. It's hard to take care of your mouth and gums at this time. It is generally important that you visit your dentist prior, during and after treatment to take care of your mouth. Your doctor and nurse will speak in detail with you about coordinating dental examinations.

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#### **End of Treatment**

#### Sore Throat

The sore throat from the radiation can last up to 6 months or more. The sore throat caused by dryness (due to loss of salivary gland function) could last forever. You may get a sore throat from yeast infections, which will need to be treated with antifungal agents.

#### Taste

Taste generally comes back slowly. If your saliva is gone, artificial saliva products may be beneficial. Continue to try the hints and tips you have received during treatment. If you find a food or liquid that works for you, great. However, you must avoid or other throat irritants to feel your best.

#### Dental Effect

Keep any appointments with your dentist and be certain to let each health professional who cares for you know that you are coordinating your appointments and receiving check-ups.

#### Follow up appointments

Routine follow-up appointments with your radiation oncologist will be scheduled. Your first appointment will be one month after your last treatment. Please schedule this appointment with the receptionist.

Now is the time to notify other physicians involved in your care of the completion of your radiation treatments.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call the CHEM Center at (781) 279-0655.