

DEALING WITH DRY MOUTH

As someone who will be receiving radiation to treat your head and neck cancer, it is important to understand how radiation can affect the production of your saliva (spit).

WHY IS MY SALIVA (SPIT) IMPORTANT?

Saliva plays an important role in your overall oral health.

- Cleans and washes away food from your gums.
- Helps protect your teeth from decay.
- Moistens your mouth and helps you speak, chew, taste, and swallow.
- Fights germs in your mouth.
- Helps protect the inside of your mouth.

HOW CAN RADIATION THERAPY AFFECT MY SALIVA?

- Radiation therapy targets cancer cells but sometimes hurts noncancer cells such as those in the glands that produce your saliva.
- The radiation therapy you receive for your head and neck cancer may damage the glands in your mouth that produce saliva (spit), resulting in dry mouth.
- Dry mouth can be a significant and harmful effect of radiation therapy in head and neck cancer patients.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF DRY MOUTH?

- YOU MAY NEED TO DRINK MORE WATER, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU EAT.
- IT MAY BE HARD TO CHEW OR SWALLOW FOOD.
- FOOD AND LIQUIDS MAY TASTE DIFFERENT TO YOU.
- YOU MAY HAVE PROBLEMS WITH YOUR TEETH SUCH AS CAVITIES, BLEEDING, OR INFECTIONS.
- YOUR SPIT MAY LOOK THICKER AND BE BROWN OR YELLOW.
- YOUR VOICE MAY SOUND DIFFERENT.
- IT MAY BE HARD TO WEAR DENTURES.

Talk to your doctor about medications that can help reduce dry mouth.

