

Sore or Dry Mouth

Medical Management

Radiation therapy to the head, neck, throat, or stomach and some types of chemotherapy can cause eating and swallowing difficulties, called dysphagia; a sore mouth or throat, known as mucositis; a chronic dry mouth, called xerostomia; and/or the inability to open your mouth widely, which is referred to as trismus. There are many medical options for managing these side effects. Please talk to your doctor or nurse for additional information about medical management of sore or dry mouth or throat if you have questions about these issues.

Using Nutrition to Help Yourself

Even if your mouth and throat are sore or dry, you can get the nutrition you need by choosing the right things to eat, avoiding food that may worsen your symptoms, and by carefully planning your eating schedule.

Nutrition Tips for Sore or Dry Mouth or Throat

- If you cannot eat for more than a day because of a sore or dry mouth or throat, call your doctor or nurse right away.
- Follow the mouth care instructions provided by your nurse or doctor exactly as prescribed.
- If helpful, use a straw to drink liquid and take small bites and chew food completely.
- Soften food with milk or other liquid, and use a blender to mash or blend fruit and vegetables.
- Focus on liquid and soft food to meet your nutrition needs. Sit down meals may not be an option.
- If cold feels good, suck on ice chips, but do not chew ice because this can damage teeth.
- Drink 8 to 12 cups of noncaffeinated liquid each day.
- Keep a water bottle with you at all times, especially when you leave home. Sip this slowly throughout the day.
- Try to eat at times of the day when mouth pain is less intense, and try swishing and gargling warm water to moisten your mouth before eating.

What to Eat and Drink

- For thick saliva, try sipping 100 percent papaya juice, which contains natural substances that can help thin saliva.
- Eat bland, easy-to-chew and swallow food, such as canned peaches or pears, yogurt, pudding, custards, and low-sodium soup or stew.

- Try high-calorie liquids and semisoft solid food, such as fruit smoothies or shakes, warm soup, pasta, casseroles prepared with plenty of liquid, juice, and oatmeal or cream of wheat prepared with extra soy or rice milk.



- Add broth, sauce, gravy, soup, yogurt, juice, jelly, olive or canola oil, or butter to soften and moisten food.
- Sip warm, noncaffeinated tea.
- Try sucking on frozen fruit, such as frozen grapes, wedges of cantaloupe, peach slices, and watermelon.
- Eat fruit that contains plenty of water, such as watermelon, peaches, and nectarines.
- Experiment with temperature to find out what you tolerate best.
- Try liquid nutrition products, such as Ensure and Boost, to fill in the gaps when you are unable to eat regular food.

What to Avoid

- Fruit that contains small seeds, such as berries.
- Acidic food, such as citrus, pineapple, and tomato products, and very salty or spicy food.
- Crunchy or dry items, such as crackers, chips, pretzels, dry toast, raw vegetables, and tough meats.
- Food and drinks that contain caffeine, such as coffee, soda, cola, and chocolate.
- Alcoholic beverages, including beer, wine, and mixed drinks.
- Mouthwashes that contain alcohol, which can be drying.
- Tobacco, including cigarettes, pipes, and chewing tobacco.
- Chewing gum or mints that contain sugar substitutes, such as Nutrasweet, Splenda, mannitol, and sorbitol.
- Finally, do not avoid mouth care. This can increase your risk for more serious mouth infections.