

CARING FOR YOUR SMILE BEFORE CANCER TREATMENT

A Guide to Oral Health



Before starting radiotherapy, it is very important to make sure your mouth is as healthy as possible.

When the teeth and jaws are exposed to radiation, the blood supply to the bone is reduced. This makes it much harder for the bone to heal if it is injured later. After radiotherapy, if a tooth needs to be removed or surgery is done in the treated area, the bone may not heal properly and can develop a serious infections or non-healing areas called osteoradionecrosis.

By treating dental problems and removing unhealthy teeth before radiotherapy starts, we can lower the risk of infections and protect your mouth during and after your cancer treatment.

What to expect at your pre-radiation dental assessment

Before you start your radiation treatment, it's really important to have your teeth checked. This helps us keep your mouth healthy and avoid problems later on. Here's what we'll do:



1. Dental Exam:

The dentist will take a careful look at all your teeth, your gums, and the inside of your mouth. They will check for things like cavities, gum issues, or any spots that might need attention.

2. Dental Radiographs

A full mouth x-ray will be taken to assess the health of your jaw bones and teeth, and additional smaller x-rays may be needed.



3. Discussion About Your Dental Health and What We Can Do:

After the check-up and x-rays, the dentist will talk with you about what they found and what the best plan is for your teeth before your radiation starts. This is a good time to ask any questions you have.

4. Treatments we might provide:

- Teeth in poor condition will be removed, especially in the radiation field
- Your teeth may need professional cleaning or temporary restorations
- Fluoride varnish may be applied to your teeth. You should wait 30 minutes after application to eat or drink.
- Impressions for medication trays and/or radiation stents may be taken, if required.
- A radiation stent positions the jaw during radiation to reduce radiation effects on healthy tissue. The stent will be fitted on a subsequent visit, if required by your oncology team.



Our goal is to make sure your mouth is in great shape before your radiation starts. This helps make your treatment go smoother and keeps you more comfortable.

How to care for your mouth: Guidelines

- Gentle tooth brushing twice daily with a soft toothbrush & flossing or interdental cleaning daily
- A high fluoride toothpaste will be prescribed for you by the dentist during and after radiotherapy as there is high risk of tooth decay
- Using alcohol-free fluoride mouthwash once daily (0.05% sodium fluoride) at a different time to toothbrushing
- Avoid sugary food or drinks and increase your consumption of non-starchy vegetables and fruits.
- Keep your mouth moist and lubricated
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol
- Your dentist will advise you about daily jaw exercises to maintain your mouth opening during and after radiotherapy
- It is important to regularly attend your dentist and dental hygienist for routine care and have at least twice-yearly application of fluoride varnish

STRONG ORAL HEALTH

is your
strength
through every
step of
treatment

