



Sore Mouth

Cancer and cancer treatment can sometimes cause the mouth to become very sore and make it difficult to chew and swallow. Certain chemotherapy agents and radiation therapy to the head and neck area can make the inside of the mouth raw and irritated. There are things you can do to help your mouth heal and to make it feel better.

- ◆ Choose soft, bland-tasting foods that are served cold or at room temperature. Try blenderized fruits and vegetables; creamed soup; cooked cereal; macaroni and cheese; yogurt; pudding; and chicken, beef, or fish cooked until very tender. Other soft foods include milkshakes, bananas, applesauce, mashed potatoes, pasta, noodles, cottage cheese, custard, gelatin, scrambled eggs, and pureed meats.
- ◆ Chilled foods and beverages can be soothing. Try freezing fruits such as grapes, banana pieces, melon balls, peach slices, or mandarin orange slices. Suck on frozen fruit pops (Popsicles), fruit ices, ice chips, or other cold foods.
- ◆ Puree or liquify foods in a blender to make them easier to swallow.
- ◆ Add broth, soup, sauces, gravy, butter, or margarine to moisten foods. Dip or soak food in whatever you are drinking.
- ◆ Serve foods cold or lukewarm, rather than hot, to reduce mouth irritation.
- ◆ Eat high-protein, high-calorie foods to speed healing.

What to Avoid

- ◆ Avoid citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruit, limes, lemons) and tomatoes because their high acid content can irritate a sore mouth.
- ◆ Avoid irritating spices, seasonings, and condiments such as pepper, chili powder, cloves, nutmeg, salsa, pepper sauces, and horseradish, although capsaicin taffy has been helpful for mouth pain (see recipe).
- ◆ Avoid rough, dry, or coarse foods, which can scratch an irritated mouth or throat.
- ◆ Avoid commercial mouthwashes, alcoholic and acidic beverages, and tobacco. They can dry and irritate your mouth.

Helpful Techniques

- ◆ Tilt your head back and forth to help foods and liquids flow to the back of the throat for swallowing.
- ◆ Drink through a straw to bypass an irritated mouth, especially if you have sores and tender places in your mouth.
- ◆ Rinse your mouth often with baking soda and salt mouth rinse (made with 1 quart water, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon baking soda) to remove food and germs, and to enhance healing.

What to Ask Your Doctor, Dietitian, or Nurse

- ◆ Ask about nutritional supplements, such as liquid meal replacements, because they may be helpful during this time. Your doctor, nurse, or dietitian may have samples and suggestions about which supplements would be best for you.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about medications that can numb and soothe your mouth or throat.

Food List

	Recommended	Foods That May Cause Distress
High-protein foods	Ground, chopped, or blenderized meats, poultry, or fish; casseroles; egg, cheese, and bean dishes; milkshakes, yogurt, and commercial liquid nutritional supplements	Whole meats, poultry, or fish; dry meats
Breads, cereals, rice, and pasta	Moistened breads, cooked cereals, cold cereal soaked in milk, pasta and rice in sauce	Dry toast, hard rolls, English muffins, dry crackers, bagels
Fruits and vegetables	Cooked or blenderized fruits and vegetables	Fresh fruits and vegetables (unless very ripe, soft, and juicy—for example, bananas or watermelon); citrus fruits, pineapple, and other acidic fruits; pickled fruits; raw and pickled vegetables
Beverages, desserts, and miscellaneous	Fruit nectars; flavored gelatin, ice cream, sherbet, or pudding; butter, margarine, and vegetable oils	Carbonated beverages; cookies and cakes unless soaked in liquids; crunchy snacks such as pretzels and chips; condiments such as pepper sauces, chili, salsa, pepper, and cloves; vinegar



Recipes Recipes Recipes

Apricot Smoothie

¼ cup plain or vanilla yogurt
½ cup whole milk
½ cup canned apricots (packed in heavy syrup)
1 tbsp honey

Blend ingredients to desired consistency and chill well before serving.

Makes one serving. Each serving contains 280 calories and 8 grams protein (calculated with plain nonfat yogurt).

Peaches and Cream

1 cup whole milk
1 cup canned peaches (packed in heavy syrup),
including juice
1 cup vanilla ice cream or frozen yogurt
Almond or vanilla extract to taste

Blend ingredients and chill well before serving.

Makes two servings. Each serving contains 300 calories and 7 grams protein.

Capsaicin Taffy*

1 cup sugar
¾ cup light corn syrup
⅔ cup water
1 tbsp cornstarch
2 tbsp butter or margarine
1 tsp salt
Flavoring (such as 2 tsp vanilla)
1½ tsp cayenne pepper

Combine all ingredients except flavoring and cayenne pepper and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, to 256°F (use candy thermometer) or hard ball stage. Remove from heat and stir in flavoring and cayenne pepper. When cool enough to handle, pull taffy. When stiff, cut into strips, then into pieces, and wrap. Recipe makes about 1 pound of candy. (To begin with, the candy may be made with half the pepper called for in the recipe.)

*Reprinted from Berger A, Henderson M, Nadoolman W, Duffy V, Cooper D, Saberski L, Bartoshuk L. Oral capsaicin provides temporary relief for oral mucositis pain secondary to chemotherapy/radiation therapy. *J Pain Symptom Manage*. 1995;10:243-248. Reprinted with permission from US Cancer Pain Relief Committee.



**American
Dietetic
Association**

This handout may be duplicated for patient education.