

# Cancer Treatment and Oral Health

## Overview

An estimated 400,000 of the 1.2 million Americans diagnosed with cancer each year may develop painful and debilitating oral complications from their cancer treatment. Persons who undergo cancer treatment are sometimes unaware that a dental examination is a critical step in maintaining their overall health.

Someone who is receiving radiation therapy of the head and neck area, or has a history of such treatment, may develop certain complications including dry mouth, sensitive lesions in the oral cavity, hypersensitive teeth, rapid tooth decay and difficulty swallowing. Chemotherapy can also have significant effects on the oral cavity.

To help prevent, minimize and manage such problems, your dentist and oncologist can work together—before and during your cancer treatment.

During the treatment period for head and neck cancer, gently brush your teeth twice a day unless your dentist recommends otherwise. Your dentist may recommend a mouthrinse in addition to daily brushing. If you develop a condition called dry mouth, your dentist may recommend a saliva replacement, an artificial saliva that is available over-the-counter at pharmacies. Frequent fluoride applications may also be recommended.

Because any mouth infection may have serious implications, contact your dentist or physician immediately should any occur. Your dentist and physician both want your treatment to be as safe and effective as possible