

After your cancer treatment

We will make an appointment for you with a dentist at Guy's Hospital to check on your teeth.

Regular visits to the dentist are important because the treatments for mouth cancer can put you at greater risk of tooth disease.

With a persistent dry mouth you will be at greater risk of tooth decay, so cleaning your teeth using a fluoride toothpaste is important.

If you lose lots of teeth, you may need more complicated oral treatments. The dental oncology service will be able to organise this for you.

Diet and dental care

During your cancer treatment, it is essential that you follow the advice given by your dietitian or oncologist and keep up your calorie intake to avoid weight loss. As a consequence, your diet may change and it is important that we monitor how this is affecting your teeth, so that we can advise you appropriately.

A diet that is high in sugar will cause tooth decay, so once you have regained your strength after your cancer treatment, sugary foods should be avoided between meals.

Further information

The dental oncology service is part of the Department of Sedation and Special Care Dentistry. It is located on Floor 26 of Guy's Tower, Guy's Hospital.

Referrals to dental oncology

Ask your oncologist, surgeon or any member of your cancer care team to contact dental oncology for an initial appointment by sending a referral fax

f: 020 7188 1885 at St Thomas'

Appointments

If you have already had an appointment with dental oncology, you can contact us for advice or to make or change an appointment.

t: 020 7188 6066

Cancer treatment questions

If you have any concerns regarding your cancer treatment, please contact Clinical Oncology, Lower Ground Floor, Lambeth Wing, St Thomas' Hospital

t: 020 7188 1460

Oral cancer and dental care

Before your cancer treatment

To avoid problems during and after cancer treatment, it is important to have your teeth checked before you start treatment to ensure that they are healthy. You should have a full assessment of your teeth and gums so that your future dental care can be planned.

If you have a dentist and any treatment you need is straightforward, we can speak to your dentist about this. Otherwise, arrangements can be made for your dental treatment to be provided by the **dental oncology service** at Guy's Hospital. Appointments can be arranged to coordinate with the times that you are at the hospital for your cancer treatment.

We will also give you advice on keeping your mouth clean and healthy.

Fillings

After cancer treatment, it may be difficult or painful to open your mouth wide, so we will aim to have any fillings done before your treatment begins.

Dentures

If you wear dentures (a removable mouth plate with teeth), adjustments may be made to make these more comfortable.

Extractions (taking out teeth)

Some people need to have teeth extracted (removed) because the tooth is too infected or decayed for us to save. Your dentists will discuss this with you in more detail if you need to have teeth extracted.

Surgery

If your cancer treatment includes surgery, any extractions you need can be done at the same time as your surgery.

If you are having surgery on your top jaw, we may need to make a healing plate for your mouth. To make the plate, we will need to take an impression (mould) of your mouth before your surgery. The plate will be fitted during your surgery and will help with eating and speaking after surgery. At a later date, this can be replaced with a lighter, removable prosthetic device called an **obturator**.

Radiotherapy

If the teeth in the area where you are going to receive radiotherapy need to be removed due to dental disease, it is important that they are removed at least a week before the radiotherapy. This reduces the risk of **osteoradionecrosis** (a serious infection of the jaw).

We can make gum shields for you that will reflect some of the radiation. In order to make them, we will need to take an impression of your teeth before your radiotherapy starts. We can also apply protective fluoride to your teeth to protect them during radiotherapy. We will give you more information about care of your teeth and mouth during your radiotherapy treatment.

Specific problems that some people have when having radiotherapy for oral cancer include:

- **Dry mouth** – the best way to help with this is regular sips of water. Sometimes we can prescribe saliva substitutes (gels or sprays to apply to your mouth when it is dry). You should notice some improvement during the treatment, although this symptom often persists afterwards. Having a permanent dry mouth can cause dental decay and should therefore be treated.
- **Sore mouth** – mouthwashes containing topical anaesthetics (painkillers applied to a specific area) can help to relieve a sore mouth.
- **Difficulty brushing teeth** – try to keep up with good cleaning and use a high fluoride toothpaste. If brushing is too uncomfortable, use a soft brush. Corsodyl (chlorhexidine) mouthwash can be used with tooth brushing during radiotherapy. This will keep your mouth clean but may increase soreness. Alternatively, it can be applied directly to your teeth in a liquid or gel form.
- **Sensitive teeth** – regular use of fluoride mouthwash can help to reduce this.
- **Loss of taste** – this side effect will often improve after treatment, although altered sensation may remain.
- **Jaw stiffness** – this is a common side effect. It can be a particular problem when your jaw joint lies within the field of the radiotherapy and can occur up to three months after treatment. It is important to keep your jaw moving to reduce the risk of permanent damage. In addition, you may be given some exercises to help.