

## **Instructions for Oral Care during Radiation and chemotherapy**

It is necessary that you understand the importance of good oral hygiene and preventive care before, during, and after radiotherapy.

The purpose of radiotherapy is to reduce the growth of tumor cells. Unfortunately, tissues in the mouth are affected by radiotherapy and special care should be taken to help prevent infections in the mouth.

Ways of preventing these problems start with an examination by a dentist. If any dental procedures are necessary before radiotherapy, they usually can be done while the bone can heal properly.

### **Common Side Effects**

Dry Mouth is very common after the first week of radiotherapy and may persist as a permanent effect.

This depends on how large the area to be radiated will be. This will vary from patient to patient.

Mouth Ulcers are a common occurrence during radiotherapy. Sometimes, these ulcers are preventable by simple oral hygiene care and a cautious diet. These may occur on the lips, tongue, and roof of mouth and inside the cheek.

Swollen gums are another side effect that may occur if tartar has accumulated around and below the gum line of your teeth.

Dental Abscesses can occur if broken or impacted teeth are present during radiotherapy.

### **Oral Hygiene**

A soft toothbrush held like a pen can be used carefully during radiotherapy. If the mouth is too sore to use a toothbrush, a folded square gauze pad can be moistened with water and gently wiped over the surfaces of the teeth and/ or gums instead.

Rinsing the mouth with a salt and soda solution will remove food and debris which tends to accumulate in the mouth. (This is made by adding one teaspoon of salt and one teaspoon of baking soda to one quart of water). This solution can be used as often as necessary to provide a clean oral environment.

### **Fluoride Trays**

With radiation to the head, your salivary glands are going to stop making saliva and your mouth will become dry. This causes very fast tooth decay. Fluoride trays are used to place a gel fluoride around your teeth at nighttime. This is to prevent your teeth from being destroyed by decay. The fluoride is placed in a plastic tray on your teeth every night for the rest of your life

### **When to start using Fluoride Trays?**

You should start using the Fluoride after the radiation or chemotherapy treatments are finished and you feel better. You will then use the fluoride treatment for the rest of your life.