Tips about Mouth Care and Oral Mucositis

Good mouth care is important during treatment:

- Clean teeth and gums three times a day or more, especially after meals and before bed.
- Use a small, soft toothbrush.
  - You may soak a toothbrush in warm water for 1 to 3 minutes to make it softer.
- Rinse mouth after brushing:
  - Do not use over-the-counter (OTC) mouthwashes because they may be too harsh.
  - Your healthcare team may prescribe 0.12% chlorhexidine gluconate (Peridex), an antibiotic mouth rinse to use.
- Make mouth care a regular activity for your child. Talk to your healthcare team for tips about how to do this successfully.
- Always check with the oncology healthcare team before scheduling an appointment with a dentist:
  - The healthcare team may want to check your child’s blood counts.
  - If your child wears braces, talk to the healthcare team about a plan.

What is mucositis?

- Some chemotherapy and radiation to the head and neck can cause mouth sores, also called mucositis.
- Mouth sores or ulcers may appear when your child’s white blood cell (WBC) count starts to drop after receiving cancer treatment.
  - Once your child’s WBC count begins to rise, the mucosa will start to heal.
- Before mouth sores appear, your child’s mouth may feel more sensitive, like it does after a food burn.
- Mucositis can cause pain in the mouth and throat. It may hurt when your child swallows.
- Sores or ulcers in the mouth and GI tract are a risk for infection.
- Some children will need to be admitted for pain medicines and intravenous (IV) fluids if they are unable to eat or drink or if there are signs of infection.

Mouth care when your child has mucositis:

- If brushing with a toothbrush is painful, you may use damp gauze or sponge swabs.
  - If using sponge swabs, use 3 swabs (one for each cheek and one for the tongue).
- Do not use dental floss if your child has low counts (WBC or Platelets) or mouth sores.
- Use recommended mouth rinses:
  - Rinse with 0.12% chlorhexidine gluconate as prescribed. You may dilute it with sterile water (equal parts mouth rinse and sterile water). Do not eat or drink for 30 minutes after rinsing or swabbing.
  - Magic mouthwash is used to numb the mouth and make it less sensitive so your child can eat and drink. Ask your healthcare team about this mouthwash; it requires a prescription.
  - Salt water rinses may help; mix ½ teaspoon of salt in 1 cup of warm water.
- Apply Vaseline or Chap Stick to prevent dry, cracked lips.
- Call your healthcare team if your child has pain when swallowing.
Food suggestions if your child has mucositis:

- Liquids should be encouraged even when your child refuses to eat foods.
  - Try high calorie drinks such as Carnation Instant Breakfast, Boost, or Ensure.
  - Cool drinks such as smoothies and milkshakes may relieve pain.
  - Drinking with a straw may be more comfortable.
- Soft foods may be easier to eat.
  - Try eggs, custard, pudding, Jell-O, or blended foods (like baby food).
  - Avoid dry or hard foods (like potato chips).
- Room temperature foods or cold foods may be soothing.
  - Offer popsicles and ice cream.
- Bland or mild foods may be easier for your child to eat. Some food can make mucositis hurt more.
  - Avoid seasoned or spicy foods because they may irritate the mucosa.
  - Avoid citrus juices and tomatoes.
- If your child’s mouth is dry, chewing sugarless gum or sucking tart candy can be helpful.

Please call your healthcare team if your child has any signs of dehydration:

- Decrease in urination, less than 5 to 6 times daily
- Dark urine
- Dry skin, lips or mouth
- Crying with no tears

Calling your oncology healthcare team:

- Call 911 for all emergencies
- Oncology Phone Nurse: 215-590-2299
  - 8:30am-5:00pm, 7 days a week (including holidays)
- After 5pm: Main Hospital 215-590-1000
  - Ask for the Oncology Fellow On-Call
- Voorhees: 856-435-7502
- King of Prussia: 267-425-3320