

# Cancer, Dentistry, and a World Turned Upside Down

While many things in life create change in our routines, cancer seems to turn our world upside down. Exceptions becomes the norm, and routines becomes the exceptions. The dictionary defines routine as a regular course or procedure, a chore that we do regularly.

In the world of dentistry, it means going to the dentist every 6 months from early childhood, brushing teeth twice a day or maybe after every meal.

What happens when something like cancer comes along that not only interrupts our routine, but also leaps into our lives, suddenly, and demands a new routine? The result is mental chaos! It is like changing to a different radio station on your way to work. It may upset our psyche.

## DENTISTS AND THEIR CANCER PATIENTS

Dentists want their cancer patients to move through this journey smoothly, so they give many instructions. This happens when the patient is already receiving hundreds of instructions from doctors, oncologists, and nutritionists. Still, prevention and management of oral complications of cancer and cancer therapy is critical.

Patients usually have little or no idea just how extensive the complications can be.

**Mucositis (an acute oral mucosa reaction), loss of taste, lack of saliva, very thick saliva, an increase in caries, candidiasis, osteonecrosis, and soft-tissue necrosis are some of the most common complications.**

If Mucositis is acute, chemotherapy may have to be suspended for a week. Dental caries is seen in otherwise

clean mouths and this appears to be due to the lack of saliva as well as to changes in its chemical composition and viscosity due to the radiation therapy. Oral yeast infections of the mouth are commonly seen in irradiated patients.

When a patient is on chemotherapy, it is best to



schedule dental treatment after blood counts have recovered, usually just prior to the next scheduled chemotherapy treatment. If oral surgery is required, allow 7 to 10 days of healing before the patient's

next treatment.

## ORAL HYGIENE PROGRAM FOR THE CANCER PATIENT

An oral hygiene program must be individualised for each cancer patient and modified throughout therapy according to the patient's medical status.

- Cancer patients need to brush very gently, yet thoroughly
- Use caution while eating crunchy or sharp foods that could damage delicate oral tissues. Toothpicks should not be used
- Alcohol based mouthwashes should not be used as they have drying effects & irritating effect.

Sometimes, we don't have control over what happens, but dealing with it sensibly and responsibly is in our hands !!

For comprehensive dental care solutions, contact:

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