

Other notes:

Your speech pathologist is:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Hours: _____

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Speech Pathology and Radiation Oncology

Painful Swallowing (Odynophagia)



health · care · people

What is odynophagia?

Odynophagia is the term used to describe pain when swallowing.

Why do some patients who have radiation therapy get odynophagia?

You may experience pain when swallowing when undergoing chemotherapy and/ or radiation therapy treatment. Painful swallowing can be caused by inflammation, ulcers and stiffening of the muscles in your mouth and throat. Pain when swallowing can generally start after 2-3 weeks of radiation therapy. The pain can last for 1-2 weeks after treatment and in some cases longer.

What is the speech pathologist's role?

The speech pathologist is a specialist in swallowing difficulties. The speech pathologist will assess if you can eat and drink safely. You may need to change your diet to make swallowing easier and safer and to avoid irritating your mouth or throat. It is important to let your doctor, nurse, speech pathologist and dietitian know if your pain is affecting your eating and drinking.

Eating and drinking is important during treatment because your body needs more energy than usual for healing.

What can I do to reduce the pain when I swallow?

Your doctor and nurse will assess your pain levels regularly and adjust your pain medications as required. He or she may prescribe liquid pain relief to reduce the pain when swallowing. These are taken prior to eating to numb the mouth and throat and allow you to eat and drink.

To avoid burning your mouth and throat, you need to be careful not to eat or drink hot foods as your sensation will be reduced.



Avoid Hot Foods

Products your doctor and nurse may prescribe to numb the pain could include -

- Xylocaine Viscous
- Soluble Panadol
- Lozenges, throat sprays
- Medications to help numb your mouth and throat.

Discuss these further with your doctor and nurse.



Other remedies to help reduce the pain include -

- Good mouth care/ hygiene (refer to the mouth care handout).
- Sucking on ice or drinking a cool drink can help soothe the burning sensation.
- Texture changes – soft or a pureed diet.



Foods and drinks to avoid if your mouth is sore or your swallow is painful:

- Rough foods like nuts, crackers, dry cereal and raw fruits and vegetables. These may irritate your mouth, throat and food pipe and should be avoided.
- Citrus foods like oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes and tomatoes may cause stinging and increased discomfort in your mouth, throat and food pipe, due to their acid content.
- Spicy foods.
- Hot foods – allow hot foods to cool to room temperature before eating.