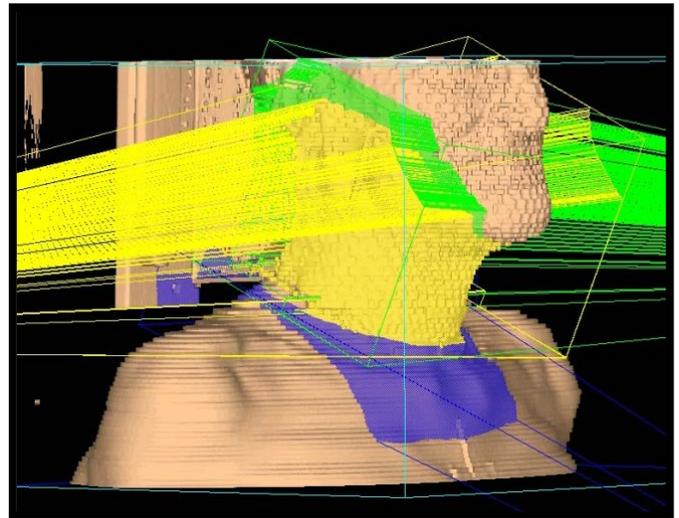


## ORAL CARE DURING HEAD AND NECK RADIOTHERAPY

### INTRODUCTION

It is extremely important to keep the mouth clean and healthy during head and neck radiation, to help reduce the risk of oral infection. A professional dental cleaning prior to radiation is highly recommended. Following are some suggestions for reducing oral complications during head and neck radiation.



### FACTS FOR PATIENTS & CAREGIVERS

- The radiation oncologist or dentist may prescribe antiviral and antifungal medications. These medications are usually very effective in lowering the risk of viral and fungal (thrush) infections in the mouth. Fewer infections in the mouth result in less pain and better nutrition.
- Toothbrushing should be performed at least twice daily. Super soft toothbrushes are available which will not cause irritation, if used appropriately. Brushing should be done in a gentle, circular motion. To be thorough, brush teeth in a systematic fashion to include all surfaces of every tooth. Flossing is recommended as well as the use of a water irrigating device, on a low setting, to eliminate food between teeth.

**Hint:** The bristles of super soft toothbrush will become even softer if held under warm water before use.

**Hint:** It is a good idea to gently brush the tongue, palate and gums with a super soft toothbrush on a daily basis in order to remove harmful germs.

**Hint:** If toothpastes burn or irritate the mouth when using them, try a toothpaste which is specially made for children or people with dry mouth.

- Saline or saltwater and baking soda rinses (1 tsp. salt and 1 tsp. baking soda to one quart of water) may be used throughout the day to soothe the sore and dry mouth. When using mouthrinses, be sure and stagger their use throughout the day, allowing at least one hour before another mouthrinse. Using several different mouthrinses one right after the other will reduce their effectiveness.
- To ease the pain of mouth ulcers, rinse with viscous lidocaine about 15 minutes before eating. There are also over the counter medications that have a numbing effect to use before eating. Eat small bites and chew thoroughly when using these numbing medicines to reduce the risk of choking.
- Keep mouth and lips well lubricated with a water-based lubricant. Petroleum jelly repels water and is not recommended for use.
- When the mouth is sore, remove dentures and leave them out until the mouth heals. All full dentures and partial dentures should be disinfected before each use. Dentures without metal may be soaked daily in a fresh solution of household bleach and water (1 tbs. bleach to 1/2 cup of water). Rinse the dentures well before placing them back in the mouth.
- Mouthrinse without alcohol, water-based lubricant and toothpaste are specially made for people with dry and sore mouths. They can be obtained through most pharmacies are over-the-counter.