



放射治療前

後的口腔護理

*The oral health care
before and after
radiotherapy*

The Oral Health Care Before and After Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy is an effective treatment for head and neck tumours. Nevertheless, the normal tissues lying along the irradiation pathway will inevitably be affected. This gives rise to a decrease in saliva secretion, change in taste sensation, difficulty in opening the mouth, inflammation of the oral mucosa (including the tongue and gums), or even destruction of some parts of the jawbones. After the radiotherapy, there may be all kinds of discomfort, but as long as you have adequate psychological preparation and knowledge on how to take care of yourself, then the discomfort can be minimized.

The following are a few points to help you:

Examination of the oral cavity before radiotherapy

The dentist will prescribe treatment such as extractions, fillings or scaling etc appropriate to your oral condition. The objectives are to make sure that you have the best oral health condition before receiving radiotherapy and to reduce the incidence of dental decay due to a change in the salivary flow later and periodontal disease.

Care of the oral cavity after radiotherapy

1. Keep your teeth clean and maintain good oral health

Tooth decay and periodontal disease easily occur in patient after receiving radiotherapy. In order to maintain good dental health, toothbrushing and using interdental cleansing aids (eg dental floss, interdental toothbrush) are very important. Furthermore, wiping the oral cavity with clean gauze dipped in saline can reduce the discomfort associated with the inflammation of the oral mucosa as well as reduce the chances of oral infection.

2. Pay attention to the diet

To ensure a fast recovery, a balanced diet is important to you. However after radiotherapy, the secretion of saliva will be less, so you need to choose foods which are soft and have high water content, in order to aid swallowing. You must avoid eating foods such as potato crisps which are hard and coarse; spicy and hot foods etc in order to avoid hurting the oral mucosa. Furthermore, you should avoid sugar-containing snacks in order to reduce the incidence of dental decay.

3. Using fluoride mouthrinse daily

The use of fluoride can effectively prevent dental decay. Therefore, apart from using fluoride toothpaste everyday, it is important to use a fluoride mouthrinse after meals for about 5 minutes each time; only then can the teeth be given additional protection from dental decay. Unfortunately, a great deal of fluoride mouthrinses in the market are not suitable for people who have had radiotherapy. Therefore, you must consult your dentist or doctor for the suitable prescription.

4. Maintaining the oral cavity moist

You may moisten your oral cavity by sipping some water from time to time. In addition, you should stop smoking and drinking wine so that your mouth will not be further insulted and dehydrated.

5. Care for the denture

In order to avoid irritation to the oral mucosa, you should refrain from wearing dentures; but if the inflammation of the oral mucosa is only mild, then you may wear the dentures briefly during eating and when participating in social activities. The dentures should always be kept clean to prevent oral mucosal infections as a result of wearing them. While not wearing, you should still clean the denture daily, and immerse it in water to prevent it from distortion.

6. Care for the skin

After radiotherapy, the skin or lips may have been burnt; these areas should not be exposed to soap, any medicated cleansing agent or moisturizer. You should only use a neutral moisturizer to apply over these areas. Furthermore, you should avoid sunlight or ultra-violet light directly shining on the skin.

7. Exercise the oral cavity

It may be difficult to open the mouth after radiotherapy so if you could exercise your mouth 3 times a day, by opening it wide for 20 cycles each time, then the difficulty of opening the mouth can be reduced.

8. Attend regular dental check-up

At the regular dental check-up, if your oral cavity has any problem, the dentist can treat it earlier, preventing it from progressing. He would also give you advice on the effective way to clean your teeth and the products to use.

If you find any discomfort and queries during radiotherapy, please ask your dentist or doctor, they will help you. Nonetheless, if you follow the doctor's advice together with the above recommendation, the discomfort associated with the radiotherapy will be reduced to a minimal; your body will also recover quite rapidly.



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