

THE ORAL HEALTH EXPERT

Get to know oral cancer so you can work with your dentist to detect symptoms. Also, learn what side effects cancer treatments can cause in the mouth.

DELTA DENTAL OF ARIZONA

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Why It's Important to Read Your Dental Policy



Most people don't curl up in a comfy chair with a cup of coffee to read their dental policies, but it pays to thoroughly read through and understand your benefits.

First of all, knowing your plan can help you save money at the dentist's office. Being part of the Delta Dental PPOSM network typically results in the lowest out-of-pocket costs, while visiting a dentist in the Delta Dental Premier[®] network also offers discounts and protection from additional billing. It also helps to know your copay and deductible amounts, and if your plan requires waiting periods before your coverage kicks in for certain procedures.

Whichever plan you have, you'll save the most money by using an in-network dentist instead of an out-of-network dentist. Delta Dental has one of the nation's largest networks - with nearly 156,000 dentists participating¹- so your dentist may be part of our network already.

You may wonder why your plan covers certain procedures but not others, or why some treatments are covered at 100 percent but you have out-of-pocket expenses for others.

All Delta Dental plans are designed with preventive care in mind. This means that most plans cover the cost of routine dental checkups, including cleanings and examinations. Covered procedures vary from plan to plan, and plans differ by state and employer.

Reviewing your benefits plan, especially prior to having costly dental work done, can help prevent financial surprises after your appointment.

CHECK FOR THESE ORAL CANCER SYMPTOMS. IT COULD BE A LIFESAVER.



More than 10,000 people lose their lives to oral cancer every year. But the five-year survival rate is approximately 60 percent.² By working with your dentist, you can catch symptoms early, which is often the key to a better outcome.

What is oral cancer?³

Oral cancer includes cancers of the mouth and the back of the throat. It may show up as an unusual lump or spot on the inside or outside of your lips, your cheeks, teeth, throat, on or under the tongue, along your gumline and on the roof or floor of your mouth.

Early detection can save your life. Because many of these issues can be seen by using a mirror and a bright light, you can serve as your first line of defense against oral cancer. That's why it's important to do monthly self-checks to detect any possible issues.

The most common symptoms⁴

Be aware of the following mouth symptoms and see your dentist if they do not disappear after two weeks:

- Red or white patches
- A sore or irritation that doesn't go away
- Pain, tenderness or numbness in your mouth or on your lips
- A lump, thickening, rough spot, crust or small eroded area
- Difficulty or pain when chewing, swallowing, speaking or moving your tongue or jaw
- A change in the way your teeth fit together when you close your mouth
- Bleeding in your mouth
- A lump in your neck or cheek
- Unexplained ear pain without hearing loss
- A feeling that something is caught in your throat

How your dentist helps⁵

Dental checkups can be an effective way to catch oral cancer early. They are also 100 percent covered under most dental plans. Even if you don't have any symptoms, make sure to schedule regular checkups.

During your checkup, tell your dentist about any symptoms you are experiencing. Your dentist will check your mouth and throat and feel your jaw and neck for any lumps or abnormalities.

If your dentist detects anything unusual, further testing will likely be recommended.

SMILE STATS



Anne Ramsey was an Oscar nominee for *Throw Mama from the Train* despite previously losing parts of her tongue and jawbone to cancer.⁶



Pureed fruit drinks were around for hundreds of years but weren't known in the U.S. until Steve Poplawski patented the electric blender in 1932.^{7,8}



Paul Revere did more than just warn of the British coming. He also practiced dentistry and was the first forensic dentist in American history.⁹

The secrets to keeping oral side effects from interrupting your cancer treatments



Chemotherapy and radiation are often used to treat cancer. These treatments can cause issues with your mouth, altering your ability to eat, talk and swallow. You'll want to promptly address these problems, so they don't cause a delay in treatment. That's why it's vital to understand the most common side effects of cancer treatments.

Dry mouth¹⁰

Radiation, especially in the head and neck area, can damage salivary glands and cause extreme dry mouth. To help prevent tooth decay and mouth infections, you will need to actively manage dry mouth by:

- Drinking lots of water to keep your mouth moist.
- Avoiding spicy and salty foods.
- Chewing sugar-free gum.
- Sucking on ice chips or sugar-free hard candy (just don't bite down!).
- Asking your dentist about a saliva substitute or other remedies.

Mucositis¹¹

Oral mucositis, a potentially painful side effect of chemotherapy, occurs when cells that line the mouth become swollen, irritated and inflamed. This can happen because chemotherapy breaks down both cancer cells and healthy cells.

The most common symptoms include redness and swelling in the gums, sores in the mouth and throat, burning and aching in the mouth, and abdominal cramps and tenderness.

As with dry mouth, you can manage the pain by drinking plenty of fluids, using lip balms or creams, brushing and flossing regularly and sucking on ice chips. Avoid smoking, alcohol and eating spicy, acidic and rough or hard foods. Look for non-alcoholic mouthwashes and steer clear of toothpastes that contain sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS), which can irritate the tissues that line the mouth and worsen mucositis.

Change in ability to taste¹²

When undergoing cancer treatments, foods can taste different than they previously did or may seem to have no flavor at all. Radiation therapy may cause a change in sweet, sour, bitter and salty flavors. Chemotherapy drugs may cause an unpleasant chemical or metallic taste in your mouth.

If this happens to you:

- Try marinating or adding herbal spices to a bland dish.
- Switch to other high-protein foods such as chicken, eggs, fish, turkey, beans or dairy products when red meat tastes off.
- Use plastic utensils and non-metal cooking dishes if food tastes metallic.
- Try sugar-free hard candies, gum or mints to get a bad taste out of your mouth.

Sometimes patients receiving head and neck cancer treatments cannot tolerate the flavor of their regular toothpaste. Don't let this interfere with your oral hygiene. Try other flavors to find one that won't irritate your mouth.

Schedule an appointment with your dentist before you begin chemotherapy or radiation treatments.¹³ Your dentist can treat any current issues and show you how to take care of your mouth to help prevent or alleviate side effects. It's likely your dentist will also prescribe a higher strength fluoride toothpaste. Continue to take good care of your mouth during treatment and visit your dentist regularly.

MOUTH-HEALTHY RECIPE: HEALTHY BLUEBERRY SMOOTHIE

Ingredients:



1 cup blueberries



½ cup almond yogurt
(look for the lowest sugar option)



1 cup almond milk



2 tablespoons chia seeds

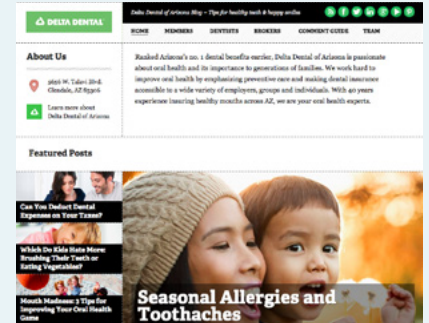
Directions:

This one's pretty easy. Just blend the ingredients until they reach the desired consistency and enjoy!

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