

# Oral health: Teeth and mouth

## Health information after cancer treatment as a child or teenager

The purpose of this factsheet is to tell you about long-term side effects (called 'late effects') that can happen after having cancer treatment. They can happen soon after treatment has finished or later in life. The medical team at the hospital where you received your treatment or your long-term follow-up team will be able to help you with specific information about which late effects are relevant to you.

Everyone should take care of their teeth, but if you have had treatment for cancer it is even more important. This is because certain cancer treatments and other conditions can affect the long-term health of your teeth, gums, and mouth.

### Who is at risk?

You may be at a higher risk of issues if you had:

- chemotherapy at a younger age before your teeth were fully formed
- radiotherapy involving the mouth and teeth, especially if it was given at a younger age or if the salivary glands were in the treated area
- graft versus host disease (GVHD) involving your mouth after a bone marrow transplant
- a specific condition called Fanconi anaemia

### What dental issues can occur after cancer treatment or GVHD?

If you have had cancer treatment or GVHD you may be at risk of the following:

- higher risk of tooth decay and dental cavities which require a filling
- missing or poorly developed teeth
- roots of your teeth become thin
- discolouration or staining of the teeth
- irregularly formed teeth (with pits or grooves)

In addition, patients with chronic GVHD involving their mouth or Fanconi anaemia, are at risk of developing oral cancer. If this is relevant to you, your long-term follow-up team will discuss this with you specifically and discuss the importance of having regular checks of your mouth.

### What additional oral issues can occur after having radiotherapy involving your mouth or salivary glands?

If you have had radiotherapy involving your mouth or salivary glands, you may be at risk of the following:

- teeth may be smaller than normal
- early loss of teeth or baby teeth not falling out
- increased teeth sensitivity to hot and cold temperatures
- changes in taste
- dry mouth due to less saliva being made
- increased risk of gum disease and infection
- bones of your jaw and face may develop abnormally which can mean that your teeth may not fit together well (malocclusion); you are unable to fully open your mouth or feeling pain and clicking of the temporomandibular joint in the jaw (in front of the ears)
- osteoradionecrosis (see CCLG late effects factsheet)

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## What can I do to prevent oral issues?

To help prevent oral issues:-

- **register with a dentist** and visit at least every six months for a check-up
- **brush your teeth twice a day** using a fluoride toothpaste and talk to your dentist about additional fluoride treatment
- **floss your teeth** or use interdental brushes in between your teeth once or twice a day
- **drink plenty of fluids** or use artificial saliva or lemon drops if mouth is dry
- **water is the best drink** for your teeth so try and avoid sugary food and drinks (such as fruit juice) and limit the number of fizzy drinks you have
- **drink alcohol in moderation**
- **avoid smoking** and chewing tobacco or betel nuts (betel quid)
- **see your dentist** if you have pain or redness of the gums or if you have any ulcers in your mouth that are taking longer than normal (over three weeks) to heal

## Where can I find more information?

**Oral Health Foundation**  
[www.dentalhealth.org](http://www.dentalhealth.org)

**The NHS has a range of information about oral health**  
[www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums)

**CureSearch**  
[www.curesearch.org/dental-health-summary](http://www.curesearch.org/dental-health-summary)



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Written by CCLG Late Effects Group, a national network of experts who specialise in looking after young cancer survivors, in conjunction with the CCLG Information Advisory Group, comprising multiprofessional experts in the field of children's cancer. If you have any comments on this factsheet, please contact us. CCLG publications on a variety of topics related to children's cancer are available to order or download free of charge from our website.

Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) is a leading national charity and expert voice for all childhood cancers.

Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed with cancer. Our network of dedicated professional members work together in treatment, care and research to help shape a future where all children with cancer survive and live happy, healthy and independent lives.

We fund and support innovative world-class research and collaborate, both nationally and internationally, to drive forward improvements in childhood cancer. Our award-winning information resources help lessen the anxiety, stress and loneliness commonly felt by families, giving support throughout the cancer journey.

Our work is funded by donations. If you would like to help, text 'CCLG' to **70300** to donate **£3**. You may be charged for one text message at your network's standard or charity rate. CCLG (registered charity numbers 1182637 and SC049948) will receive 100% of your donation.