

Ask the Dentist

Dr. Deborah Petronio



Cancer Changes Dental Considerations

A friend of mine was just diagnosed with cancer and I have heard there are special dental considerations for cancer patients.

Cancer treatments can include both chemotherapy and radiation therapy, which effect your body and your oral health differently. There are many extra considerations for patients about to start cancer treatment.

For example, chemotherapy can affect your body's ability to fight infection, so it is very important to have a thorough dental examination before starting chemotherapy to make sure you don't have any infected teeth while you are receiving treatment. You should also have a dental cleaning at the same time to remove debris and infection-causing bacteria from your mouth.

Radiation to the head and neck poses a unique set of concerns. Once a cancer patient receives radiation therapy to the head and neck region, they cannot have dental extractions performed. Radiation interferes with the body's ability to heal after extractions; indeed, extractions after radiation therapy can cause death or fracture of the jawbone. Before starting radiation therapy, any infected

teeth or teeth with severe gum disease need to be extracted.

In general, patients undergoing cancer therapy should also have cleanings and oral examination more regularly – ideally once every three months; you should also be using high-dose fluoride toothpaste, which your dentist will prescribe.

Although any dentist can treat you before, during and after your cancer therapy, it makes sense to have a thorough conversation with your dentist about your unique situation and your dental needs before starting any therapy. If in doubt, Roswell Park Cancer Institute has specialist dentists that treat cancer patients. Ask your dentist about his or her training in dental oncology and research the special needs of patients prior to receiving therapy.

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Dr. Deborah Petronio owns and operates Aurora Dental Care in East Aurora. If you would like to know more about this article or other dental issues, email Dr. Petronio or her associate Dr. Gallo (who is on staff at the Roswell Park Cancer Institute) at info@auroradentalcare.com or call 652-0190.