



# Family & Cosmetic Dentistry

by Dr. Mary Jane Hanlon

## Cancer Therapy and Oral Complications

More than one million Americans will be diagnosed with cancer in the upcoming year, and approximately 40%, or 500,000 will develop serious oral complications as the result of their treatment. Although cancer therapies such as radiation, chemotherapy and bone marrow transplantation have become more powerful and therapeutically successful over the past 10 years, the cancer-fighting treatments affect healthy tissues as well. The mouth is a frequent site of acute and chronic side effects, which can diminish quality of life for cancer patients and negatively affect treatment.

Oral complications include salivary gland dysfunction, which leads to dry mouth; rampant dental decay and mouth sores which are painful, diminish the quality of life and can lead to significant compliance problems. According to figures from the National Institute of Health (NIH), oral complications occur in almost all patients receiving radiation for head and neck malignancies, in

more than 75 percent of bone marrow transplant recipients and in nearly 40% of patients receiving chemotherapy.

According to the Academy of General Dentistry, the following pretreatment strategy is recommended for all cancer patients.

- Contact your general dentist
- Schedule oral examination before initiation of cancer therapy.
- Treat all pre-existing oral disease

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