# Oral Mucositis

Treatment for cancer typically involves a combination of chemotherapy, radiation, and/or surgery. One of the unfortunate consequences of these therapies is the development of painful mouth sores, known as oral mucositis.

With recent advances in the prevention and management of other cancer treatment-related complications, such as nausea and neutropenia (low white blood cells), oral mucositis has emerged as one of the most debilitating and dose-limiting side effects of cancer therapy.

**Causes of Oral Mucositis**

High dose chemotherapy, and localized high dose radiation therapy to the head and neck region (e.g. for treatment of head and neck cancer and lymphoma), are the main risk factors for developing oral mucositis. These treatments effectively target the rapidly dividing cancer cells, but also inadvertently affect normal healthy cells that rapidly turnover, such as the oral mucosa lining of the inside of the mouth. A complicated series of biological events are triggered that ultimately compromise the integrity of the oral mucosa. Minor trauma to the mouth from speaking, chewing, and swallowing, is sufficient to breakdown the mucosa, resulting in the formation of painful ulcerations. Individuals undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy are often advised to eat a soft or liquid diet. Mucositis is not an infectious process and therefore cannot be prevented with antibiotics or antiviral medications and cannot be passed to another person.

**Impact of Oral Mucositis**