

# HEALTH TIP SHEET

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## BASIC HYGIENE PRACTICES



### Hand Washing

One of the best ways to keep yourself from getting sick is to keep your hands clean. You should also encourage friends and family members to keep their hands clean. Let's take some time to learn more about when and how to wash your hands.

### When to Wash Your Hands

Wash your hands with soap and water:

- Before, during, and after cooking food
- Before you eat
- After going to the bathroom
- After changing diapers or helping a child to use the bathroom
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching your pet or cleaning up after your pet
- After touching trash
- Before and after treating a cut or wound or before caring for your catheter, [port](#) or other access device.

**If you are receiving chemotherapy, you may be at risk for getting an infection. Take the right steps toward preventing infections during cancer treatment by visiting [www.PreventCancerInfections.org](http://www.PreventCancerInfections.org)**



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### How to Wash Your Hands

To avoid getting sick and getting those around you sick, you need to make sure that you are washing your hands the right way.

Step 1: The first step is to wet your hands with clean running water. It doesn't matter if the water is warm or cold, but you want to be sure to apply soap.

Step 2: Rub your hands together until you make suds and scrub them well. Make sure that you scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.

Step 3: Continue rubbing your hands together for at least 20 seconds. If you need some help figuring out how long 20 seconds is, hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.

Step 4: Next, rinse the soap off of your hands under running water.

Step 5: Finally, dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry. And remember, not only is hand washing easy, but it is one of the best ways to help prevent the spread of germs no matter where you are.

### Chemotherapy and the Mouth

The medicine that you are taking to treat your cancer has an effect on the way the cells in your body make new cells. When the healthy cells in your mouth are affected, this can lead to a number of side effects.

**Tongue:** Your cancer medication can reduce the number of infection-fighting cells in your blood for a short period of time, and during this time your body's ability to combat infection may be lowered. Because of this, you are more likely to get an infection in the lining of your mouth. The most common of these infections is a fungal infection called thrush. Thrush usually appears as a white coating in the mouth and on the tongue.

**Gums:** There are times that the medicine you are taking may cause your gums to become sore and bleed.

Soft palate: Because of your medicine, your mouth may become very sore, causing small ulcers to form. This soreness is called mucositis and can be very painful.

Mouth: Just as your medicine may affect the lining of the mouth, it can also have an impact on the glands that make your saliva. This can cause you to have dry

## Keeping Your Mouth Healthy

There are a number of things that you can do to keep your mouth healthy:

- Brush your teeth and clean your dentures when you wake up, before you go to bed, and after every meal.
- Use a soft toothbrush.
- Get a new toothbrush every 3 months.
- Use the mouthwash your doctor or nurse recommends to avoid getting mouth sores. If you do develop mouth sores, speak to your doctor about whether to substitute mouthwash for salt or plain water mouth rinses, as this will cause less discomfort.
- Check with your doctor or nurse before flossing your teeth because your chemotherapy may increase your chances of bleeding when you floss.
- Avoid using toothpicks.
- Try to stay away from things that may irritate your mouth: alcohol, tobacco, spicy food, garlic, onion, vinegar, crunchy foods, and acidic drinks (e.g., orange and grapefruit juice).
- Keep your lips moist by using lip balm.
- Try to drink at least eight glasses of fluid a day.
- Check your mouth daily for redness, swelling, sores, white patches, or bleeding, and let your doctor or nurse know if any of these signs of infection are present.
- Check with your doctor or nurse before having any dental work done.

## Skin Changes

The medicines that you take to treat your cancer may cause your skin to change in a number of ways. These changes, like dry skin and irritation, can lead to openings in the skin where [germs](#) can enter and [infection](#) can set in. A few changes to your daily hygiene routine as soon as [chemotherapy](#) begins and throughout your treatment can help to keep your skin healthy and lower your risk for [infection](#). An important part of this routine is bathing.

## Skin Care and Bathing

Following the tips below will help protect your loved one's skin from damage and [infection](#):

- Bathe every day and use warm water.
- Avoid soaking in spas or hot tubs.
- Use a mild soap for bathing.
- Use a soft towel to gently wash skin.
- Be sure to clean feet, groin, underarms, and other sweaty areas well.
- Do not rub skin with the towel, instead pat it dry.
- Do not share bath towel with other family members.
- Use unscented lotion or moisturizing cream on skin after it has dried completely.

## Protecting Skin From Cuts and Scrapes

While you are going through [chemotherapy](#), your body will not be able to fight [germs](#) off as well as it normally would. At every step of your treatment, it is important to protect yourself from getting an [infection](#). One of the ways you can do this is by protecting your skin from cuts and scrapes because these are easy ways for [germs](#) to enter your body.

## Protecting Skin From Injury and Infection

If you follow a few simple steps you can protect yourself from injury and [infection](#):

- Use an electric razor instead of a blade when shaving to prevent nicks.
- Be careful when handling sharp items.
- Wear gloves when gardening to protect your hands from cuts and scrapes.
- Use caution when exercising to avoid grazing or scraping your skin.
- Use caution when walking on wet or slippery surfaces to avoid falling and scraping your skin.
- Do not cut, tear, or bite cuticles.
- Avoid manicures and pedicures.
- Do not squeeze or scratch pimples.
- Wear clothing that is appropriate for the type of activity you plan to do (for example, wearing long sleeves and gloves when gardening).

## Wound Care

As we discussed before, infection is what can happen when germs enter your body. One of the many ways that germs can make their way in is through a break in your skin like a cut or scrape. Because of your cancer and some of the medicines you are taking, it is important to take care of these wounds properly before they become a serious problem. Although there are things that you can do to lower your chance of getting a cut or a scrape, accidents happen. If you scrape your skin or get a minor cut, follow these simple steps to lower your risk for getting an infection:

- Step 1: Wash and dry your hands with soap and water.
- Step 2: Place the wound under running water to rinse out any dirt. Any large debris can be removed using a clean pair of tweezers.
- Step 3: Wash the skin around the cut with warm soap and water and apply antibiotic cream.
- Step 4: Use an adhesive bandage to cover the wound. You may also use gauze and hypoallergenic tape to cover the wound if your skin is sensitive.
- Step 5: Change the bandage daily, or if it becomes wet or dirty.

## Wound Care: When to Call Your Doctor or Nurse

Any time your loved one changes a bandage he or she should check for signs of [infection](#). Call the doctor or nurse, if you or your loved one notices any of the following:

- Drainage, especially if it is yellow in color
- Odor coming from the wound
- Redness in skin around the wound
- Swelling of the skin around the wound
- Pain or tenderness