

Saliva Management

After radiotherapy people often experience a dry mouth and thick mucus due to the impact of this treatment on the salivary glands. There is no cure, however some useful strategies are:

Hydration

If you can swallow safely, drink at least two litres of fluids daily. This can include herbal teas, fruit teas, fizzy water and water with squash but does not include tea, coffee, fruit juices or alcohol. Keep a bottle with you so you can take regular sips of water throughout the day.

Steaming

Hold your head (at a safe distance) over a bowl of hot water, cover with a towel and breathe in the vapour for 2-3 minutes, 3-4 times a day. You could also try inhaling over a hot cup of tea or in a hot shower /bath. At night-time, you could place a bowl of hot water in the corner of the room to add moisture to the room air or try a humidifier.

Artificial Saliva

Sprays (e.g., Boots own brand), gels (e.g., Xerotin), mouthwashes (e.g., Biotene) and low-foaming toothpastes (e.g., Oral Nurse) are available over the counter in chemists or you can ask your clinical nurse specialist, consultant, dentist, or GP to prescribe them. People usually find the gels more effective than the sprays but do experiment for yourself.

XyliMelts

A small disc which is placed in the gum line. It slowly releases Xylitol to temporarily relieve your dry mouth day and night. XyliMelt discs coat, moisturise and lubricate, whilst stimulating the production of saliva and relieving your dry mouth.

Mouthwashes

Warm saltwater wash. Mix 100mls cold water with 50mls boiled water and stir in a teaspoon of salt. Swish this around your mouth and gargle gently with it, once or twice a day.

Olive oil + water wash. Mix olive oil and water together 50:50 and rinse this around your mouth, then spit out.

Acupuncture

This isn't right for everyone and not everybody is suitable but ask your Head & Neck Surgeon or Oncologist if you want to find out more. Acupuncture is available at The Royal Marsden Hospital.

Break down thick mucus

The hospital or GP can offer you a nebuliser which is a machine to turn a liquid medicine into a fine mist to help break down thick saliva. Sucking on a piece of pineapple or papaya (or drinking as a diluted juice with water) may help to overcome the side effect of sticky secretions as they contain an enzyme that helps to break down thick phlegm.

Alternatively, some people find that due to their surgery they have difficulties containing saliva in the mouth which leads to drooling. Try:

- Maintaining an upright posture with your head in a neutral position to prevent gravity adding to drooling. If your head position is downward, tilt your head back slightly and swallow.
- Regular saliva swallows: you may have to consciously think about swallowing more often. There is a swallow reminder app on smart phones or you could place stickers around the house as prompts. Swallow your saliva before each sentence when talking as speaking can cause more drooling / spitting.

- Try slurping your saliva to move it to the back of your mouth before swallowing.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your speech and language therapist on 020 8725 1163 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm). Out of hours, please leave a message.

Email: headandneckslt@stgeorges.nhs.uk

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit

www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: SLT_SAM_LP_01 **Published:** October 2023 **Review date:** October 2025