Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Oral Irrigations

This information explains how to do oral irrigations.

Oral irrigations are done to keep your mouth clean and moist. Irrigate your mouth when you wake up in the morning, after eating, and at bedtime. Your nurse will give you an oral irrigation set with all the supplies you need.

How to Perform Oral Irrigations

1. Gather your supplies. You will need:
   - The irrigation set your nurse gave to you
   - A towel or plastic bib
   - Table salt
   - Baking soda
   - A coat hanger
2. Place a towel or plastic bib around your neck to protect your clothes.
3. Press the clamp shut.
4. Pour 1 quart of warm tap water into the bag. Add:
   - 1 teaspoon of table salt
   - 1 teaspoon of baking soda
5. Place the bag on a coat hanger. Hang it up over a shower rod or hook in

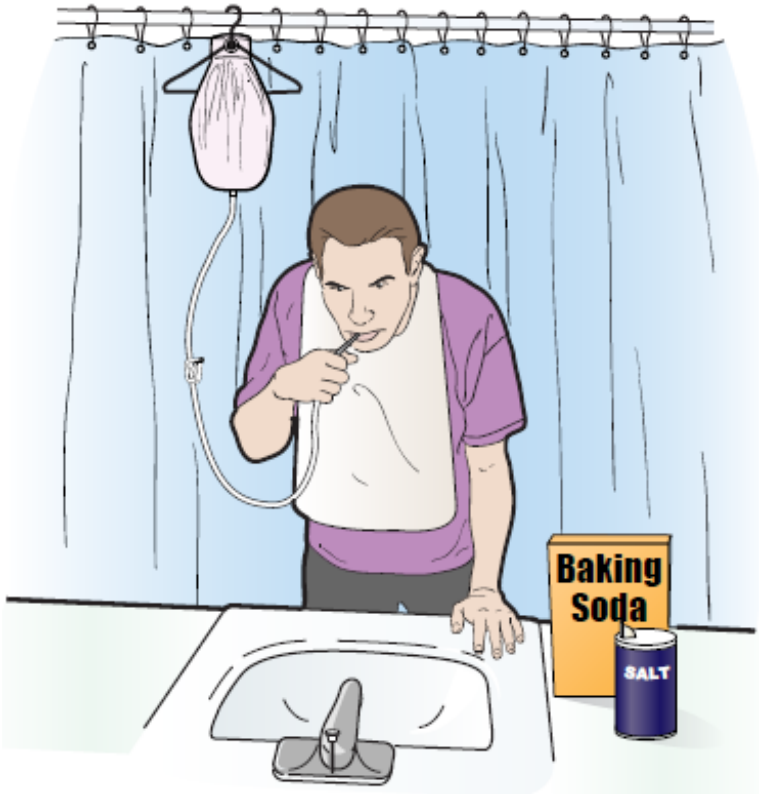


Figure 1. Performing an oral irrigation

the bathroom, close to the sink (see Figure 1).

6. Hold the tubing over the sink and unclamp the tubing. Let the solution you made run through the end of the tubing and then clamp the tubing to keep the water from flowing out into the sink.
7. Bend so that your mouth is over the sink. Open the clamp and pinch the tubing. Put the rubber catheter (thin, flexible tube) into your mouth.
8. Pinch and release the catheter with your fingers to control the water flow. Move the tip of the catheter all around your mouth. Be careful not to direct the flow towards the back of your mouth because it could make you gag.
9. Let the solution drain from your mouth into the sink.
10. Continue to do this until you have used all of the solution.
11. Clean your oral irrigation set by following the steps in the “Cleaning Your Oral Irrigation Set” section.

Cleaning Your Oral Irrigation Set

After you irrigate your mouth, clean your oral irrigation set by following these steps:

1. Wash each part of your set with soap and warm water.
2. Dry the inside of the bag with a paper towel. Throw out the paper towel.
3. Place a dry paper towel inside the bag to absorb any remaining moisture. Leave the paper towel in the bag until your next use.
4. Store your oral irrigation set in a cool, dry place until your next irrigation.
    - On warm days, you may want to place your clean irrigation bag in a plastic bag and store it in your refrigerator.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5 p.m., during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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