

Throat Changes

What they are

Radiation therapy to the neck or chest can cause the lining of your throat to become inflamed and sore. This is called [esophagitis](#). You may feel as if you have a lump in your throat or burning in your chest or throat. You may also have trouble swallowing.

Why they occur

Radiation therapy to the neck or chest can cause throat changes because it not only kills cancer cells, but can also damage the healthy cells that line your throat. Your risk for throat changes depends on how much radiation you are getting, whether you are also having chemotherapy, and whether you use tobacco and alcohol while you are getting radiation therapy.

How long they last

You may notice throat changes 2 to 3 weeks after starting radiation. You will most likely feel better 4 to 6 weeks after radiation therapy has finished.

Ways to manage

- **Be careful what you eat when your throat is sore.**
 - Choose foods that are easy to swallow.
 - Cut, blend, or shred foods to make them easier to eat.
 - Eat moist, soft foods such as cooked cereals, mashed potatoes, and scrambled eggs.
 - Wet and soften food with gravy, sauce, broth, yogurt, or other liquids.
 - Drink cool drinks.
 - Sip drinks through a straw.
 - Eat foods that are cool or at room temperature.
- **Eat small meals and snacks.** It may be easier to eat a small amount of food at one time. Instead of eating 3 large meals each day, you may want to eat 5 or 6 small meals and snacks.
- **Choose foods and drinks that are high in calories and protein.** When it hurts to swallow, you may eat less and lose weight. It is important to keep your weight the same during radiation therapy. Having foods and drinks that are high in calories and protein can help you. See the [chart of foods and drinks that are high in calories and protein](#) for ideas.
- **Sit upright and bend your head slightly forward when you are eating or drinking.** Remain sitting or standing upright for at least 30 minutes after eating.

- **Don't have things that can burn or scrape your throat, such as:**
 - Hot foods and drinks
 - Spicy foods
 - Foods and juices that are high in acid, such as tomatoes and oranges
 - Sharp, crunchy foods such as potato or corn chips
 - All tobacco products, such as cigarettes, pipes, cigars, and chewing tobacco
 - Drinks that contain alcohol
- **Talk with a dietitian.** He or she can help make sure you eat enough to maintain your weight. This may include choosing foods that are high in calories and protein and foods that are easy to swallow.
- **Talk with your doctor or nurse.** Let your doctor or nurse know if you notice throat changes, such as trouble swallowing, feeling as if you are choking, or coughing while eating or drinking. Also, let him or her know if you have pain or lose any weight. Your doctor can prescribe medicines that may help relieve your symptoms, such as antacids, gels that coat your throat, and pain killers.

Let your doctor or nurse know if you:

- **Have trouble swallowing**
- **Feel as if you are choking**
- **Cough while you are eating or drinking.**