



Dry Mouth

An Information Leaflet
About Dry Mouth
(Xerostomia)

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Dry mouth is the feeling that there is not enough saliva in the mouth. Everyone has a dry mouth occasionally - if they are nervous, upset or under stress.

But if you have a dry mouth all or most of the time, it can be uncomfortable and can lead to serious health problems. It can also be a sign of certain diseases and conditions.

Dry mouth can;

- Cause difficulties in tasting, chewing, swallowing, and speaking.
- Increase your chance of developing dental decay and other infections in the mouth.

Dry mouth is not a normal part of aging. So if you think you have dry mouth, see your dentist or medical doctor - there are things you can do to get relief.

What are the causes of dry mouth?

People get dry mouth when the glands in the mouth that make saliva are not working properly. Because of this, there might not be enough saliva to keep your mouth wet. There are several reasons why these glands (called salivary glands) might not be working properly.

- **Side effects of some medicines;** More than 400 medicines can cause the salivary glands to make less saliva. For example, medicines for high blood pressure and depression often cause dry mouth.
- **Radiation therapy;** The salivary glands can be damaged if they are exposed to radiation during cancer treatment.
- **Chemotherapy;** Drugs used to treat cancer can make saliva thicker, causing the mouth to feel dry.
- **Disease;** Some diseases affect the salivary glands. Sjögren's syndrome, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes can all cause dry mouth.
- **Nerve damage;** Injury to the head or neck can damage the nerves that tell salivary glands to make saliva.

The role of saliva

Saliva does more than keep the mouth wet.

- It helps digest food
- It protects teeth from decay
- It prevents infection by controlling bacteria and fungi in the mouth
- It makes it possible to chew and swallow

Without enough saliva you can develop tooth decay and other infections in the mouth. You might also not consume sufficient nutrients if you cannot chew and swallow certain foods.

Symptoms of dry mouth

- A sticky, dry feeling in the mouth
- Trouble chewing, swallowing, tasting, or speaking
- A burning feeling in the mouth
- A dry feeling in the throat
- Cracked lips
- A dry, rough tongue
- Mouth sores
- An infection in the mouth

What can I do?

- Sip water or sugarless drinks often.
- Sip water or a sugarless drink during meals. This will make chewing and swallowing easier. It may also improve taste of food.
- Chew sugarless gum or suck sugarless sweets to stimulate saliva flow.
- Salvia substitute sprays, gels and mouthwashes are available in pharmacies.
- Visit your dentist if you are experiencing dry mouth.
- Your dentist or your medical team may prescribe a high-dose fluoride toothpaste.

Source; National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) National Institute of Health Bethesda, MD 20892-2190 USA.



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