

DRY MOUTH (XEROSTOMIA) CAUSES AND TREATMENT



Does your mouth feel dry and sticky when you first wake up in the morning? Do you feel the urge to drink lots of water? Dry mouth, or xerostomia, is a condition which slows or prevents saliva production. It can make it hard for you to swallow, chew your food or speak clearly. Dry mouth can contribute to tooth decay, causing it to progress very quickly. Untreated, dry mouth can also contribute to bad breath.

What Causes Dry Mouth??

Dry mouth (xerostomia) can be caused by the medicine you take, both prescription and over-the-counter. Don't stop taking your medication, but mention dry mouth to your physician or dentist. Dry mouth can also be a sign of diseases and other conditions like diabetes - so make sure you tell your medical or dental professional about dry mouth if it becomes a problem for you.

Dry Mouth Symptoms:

- Dry or sticky feeling in the mouth like your mouth is stuffed with cotton balls.
- Burning feeling in mouth or tongue and sometimes tongue feels like shoe leather.
- Difficulty or discomfort when chewing, swallowing or speaking.
- Dry lips and throat or mouth sores.

Risk factors for dry mouth include:

- Medications - check with your medical or dental professional about dry mouth as a possible side effect.
- Sjögren's syndrome~ dry mouth may be present in combination with dry eyes.
- Diabetes mellitus~ poor glycemic control has been associated with dry mouth.
- HIV/AIDS
- Depression
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Alzheimer's disease
- Addison's disease
- Alcoholic cirrhosis
- Generalized dehydration and salivary gland infection

Questions About Dry Mouth - Answer Yes or No:

1. Are you taking one or more prescription drugs on a daily basis?
2. Does your mouth feel sticky and dry when you wake up in the morning?
3. Do you have difficulty swallowing or speaking?
4. Do you sip a lot of water to keep your mouth from feeling dry?

5. Does your throat feel dry and does your mouth sometimes burn?
6. Does your tongue burn or has it changed to a darker red color?
7. Does your tongue sometimes feel as dry as shoe leather?
8. Do you sometimes get mouth or tongue sores that will not go away?
9. Does the amount of saliva in your mouth seem to be too little?
10. Do you sip liquids to aid in swallowing dry foods?
11. Does your mouth feel dry after eating a meal?

If you responded "yes" to one or more questions, talk to your physician/nurse and visit your dentist/dental hygienist for information on dry mouth and oral health.

Dry Mouth Treatment and Care Tips:

- Sip room-temperature water throughout the day and night and carry a water bottle with you at all times.
- Avoid drinking water at an extreme water temperature (very hot or very cold).
- Only drink sugarless drinks and avoid carbonated beverages.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine because caffeine can dry out the mouth. Drinking coffee, tea or a diet soda occasionally is OK but don't overdo it.
- While eating a meal, make sure you include a beverage like water. Drink water before, during and after the meal.
- Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless candy to stimulate salivary flow.
- Both alcoholic beverages and smoking dry out the mouth and make you more susceptible to gum diseases and oral cancer.
- Use an alcohol free mouthwash. Read the label and make sure alcohol is not listed as an ingredient.
- Try using a nighttime humidifier to moisten room air.

Visit your dentist to develop a comprehensive plan for dry mouth treatment and management. This plan may include more frequent trips to the dentist.

In-office dental treatment for dry mouth and its related problems may include topical fluoride treatments, prescription home fluoride, antibacterial/antifungal mouthwashes or other products including Xylitol gum. Diagnostic x-rays may need to be taken more frequently to monitor dental decay. Home-care instructions should be customized according to patient needs.

If you have a persistent dry mouth, you may be at greater risk for fungal or viral infections in your mouth. These ulcerations may also develop from trauma caused by friction of oral tissues against denture clasps, appliances or edges of worn or defective dental restorations.

There are many medications available for use in treating common infections associated with dry mouth.

For more information on dry mouth, talk to your dental team.