

Dry Mouth – Xerostomia

Dry mouth is a health problem that contributes to tooth decay and other mouth infections. Dry mouth may indicate a more serious problem in your body. If you suffer from any of these symptoms, my advice is to inform your doctor and dentist at the first opportunity.

What Is Dry Mouth?

Many people suffer from dry mouth, or Xerostomia (pronounced "xero-ro-stoh-me-a") and exhibit one or more of the following symptoms:

- The need to moisten their mouth frequently
- Mouth is dry at bedtime
- Less saliva is present than before
- Difficulty swallowing
- Trouble eating foods such as crackers or toast

Most cases of dry mouth are caused by the failure of the salivary glands to function normally. However, in some people dry mouth occurs even though their salivary glands are normal. Although dry mouth is not a disease itself, it can be a symptom of certain diseases. Dry mouth is also a common side effect of some prescription and over-the-counter medications and medical treatments.

What Happens When You Have Dry Mouth?

Patients with dry mouth have a range of discomfort and symptoms. Some people feel a dry or burning sensation in their mouths or an inability to chew, taste swallow and speak. Changes in saliva can also affect oral and dental health. Severe cases of dry mouth can include symptoms such as splitting or cracking of the lips and/or corners of the mouth, changes in the surface of the tongue, rampant tooth decay, ulceration of the mouth's linings, and infection.

What Causes Dry Mouth?

Less serious cases of dry mouth may be brought on by hot weather, salty foods and exercise. The easy answer is to drink water.

Medications

Over 400 commonly used drugs can cause the sensation of dry mouth. The main culprits are antihypertensives (for high blood pressure) and antidepressants. Pain killers, tranquilizers, diuretics and over the counter antihistamines can also decrease saliva.

Cancer Treatment

Radiation therapy can permanently damage salivary glands if they are in the field of radiation.

Chemotherapy can change the composition of saliva, creating a sensation of dry mouth.

Diseases

Sjögren's Syndrome is an auto immune disorder whose symptoms include dry mouth and dry eyes.

Other

Bone marrow transplants, endocrine disorders, nutritional deficiencies such as Vitamin A, Vitamin B12, iron or zinc, anemia, anxiety, mental stress, and depression can all be causes of dry mouth.

Why Is Saliva Important?

Saliva has many important functions in the body and each person needs an adequate amount to:

- Limit the growth of bacteria that can cause tooth decay and other oral infections.
- Preserve teeth by bathing them with protective minerals that allow early cavities to remineralise and heal
- Lubricate the soft tissues lining the mouth to keep them pliable and make speaking and chewing easier.
- Lubricate the food so it can be swallowed and assist in digestion

Is Natural Relief Available?

- Take frequent sips of water drinks and avoid drinks with caffeine
- Drink frequently while eating
- Keep a glass of water by your bed at night
- Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugarless hard candy or mints
- Avoid tobacco and alcohol (as these dry the mouth)
- Avoid spicy or highly acidic foods
- Eat celery, cucumbers, carrots, apples, melons, or any other high-water content fruits or vegetables.
- Rinse the mouth regularly with mouth wash (but do not swallow it)

Can Your Doctor Help?

- Your doctor may decide to prescribe medication.
- However, drugs should be taken as a last resort due to the possible side effects with them. Ask your doctor for more details on side effects.
- Discuss with your doctor discontinuing medication if your symptoms improve.
- Herbal remedies or homeopathic treatments may be a viable alternative to medication.

Try to practice your deep breathing exercises. Deep breathing has many health effects on the body.



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