



Dry Mouth (Xerostomia)

A dry mouth is a condition whereby you do not produce enough saliva (spit) to keep your mouth feeling wet. A dry mouth can make it difficult for you to swallow, chew your food or speak clearly. If left untreated, it may cause bad breath and tooth decay.

Dry mouth symptoms

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

Risk factors for a dry mouth

- Medications – about 500 or more!
- Sjogren's Syndrome – dry mouth may be present in combination with dry eyes
- Diabetes mellitus – poor glycaemic control has been associated with a dry mouth
- HIV/AIDS
- Depression
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Alzheimer's disease
- Alcoholic cirrhosis
- Generalised dehydration and salivary gland infection

Dry mouth comfort and care tips

- Sip room-temperature water throughout the day and night
- Avoid drinking lots of water at an extreme 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
- 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 sugar free sweets
- If you smoke or drink alcohol, don't! Both alcoholic beverages and smoking dry out the mouth and make you more susceptible to gum disease and oral cancer
- Use an alcohol-free mouthwash if you are in the habit of regularly using a mouthwash



- Try using a night time humidifier to moisten room air

A persistent dry mouth may make you at greater risk of oral fungal and viral infections. 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. Dental treatments that may help with the treatment and possible effects of dry mouth include, salivary substitutes, topical fluoride gels/varnishes/toothpaste and fluoride/antibacterial mouthrinses.

If you think you have a dry mouth, please tell your dentist, who will be happy to discuss your concerns and help in your management and treatment.