

Ways to decrease and treat dry mouth symptoms

There are a number of dry mouth treatments that will help restore moisture to the mouth. But the first step is always to discuss your symptoms and possible treatment with your dentist.

The best defence against dry mouth is moisturizing the mouth to relieve dryness. As plaque is difficult to control in a dry mouth, sugar-free foods are recommended.

Saliva also serves to wash away food debris and this helps to control plaque as well.

Your dentist can help you come up with a plan to treat both the symptoms and the side-effects, such as decay.

Your dentist may suggest one or more of the following:

- H₂O. While there are many salivary substitutes on the market, some people don't like the texture. Patients may take frequent sips of water.
- Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugar-free mints containing xylitol; these stimulate saliva production and xylitol helps protect teeth against cavities.
- Avoid tobacco, caffeine, and alcohol.
- If you use mouthwash, be sure it is alcohol free.
- Use a saliva replacement gel to help lubricate your mouth; they are available at the pharmacy.
- Talk to your physician about changing your medications to ones that do not cause dry mouth.
- Finally, be sure to visit your SADA dentist regularly so he or she can provide protective fluoride treatments and other care essential to keeping your teeth and mouth healthy. The biggest problem for patients with dry mouth is rampant decay.

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Dry Mouth

Somebody Bring Me Some Water

If your mouth often feels dry and uncomfortable, you may have xerostomia.

That's the clinical term for dry mouth — a common condition that occurs when the amount of saliva in your mouth, well, dries up. A reduced saliva flow may lead to all kinds of problems, including bad breath, cavities, oral trauma, gum disease, mouth infections and difficulty swallowing, eating or talking.

Saliva has antibacterial, digestive, mineralizing and lubricating properties that keep the mouth healthy, and both the quantity and quality are important.

Who gets dry mouth?

While anyone can develop dry mouth, it's most common in older patients who tend to be on more medications and are more likely to have had a recent change in health.

Seniors are also more likely to have teeth with exposed roots due to a number of factors including, but not limited to their age, tobacco use, and oral hygiene habits. Root surfaces are more prone to cavities because they do not have enamel to protect them. The combination of exposed root surfaces and dry mouth increases the likelihood of cavities forming.

What are the signs and symptoms of dry mouth?

Symptoms of dry mouth may include the following:

- Increased need to sip or drink fluids when swallowing
- Difficulty speaking
- Difficulty swallowing

- A burning sensation or soreness in the mouth
- Inability to eat certain foods
- Diminished or altered sense of taste
- Increased susceptibility to oral infection
- Sleep interruptions due to thirst
- Difficulty wearing dentures
- Tooth decay
- Gingivitis
- Stale or bad breath

What causes it?

Dry mouth can be caused by many factors. Medications are the biggest culprit, especially medications for anxiety, depression or hypertension. Taking multiple medications complicates matters. It's important that people are aware of the medications they're taking and the medical conditions that can have an effect on the environment in their mouth and talk to their dentist.

Radiation and Chemotherapy: Individuals who undergo radiation or chemo-therapy for head and neck cancers experience xerostomia. The salivary glands can be permanently damaged and saliva can be reduced and/or its consistency changed.

Disease: Dry mouth may be a sign of an underlying disease such as diabetes or Sjögren's syndrome, a disorder in which immune cells attack and destroy the tear and saliva glands. (Sjögren's is an auto-immune disorder that can cause dry, sandy eyes and a dry mouth.

Substance Abuse: Dry mouth is a common symptom of substance abuse as many drugs reduce saliva production. Abusers tend to have a higher incidence of cavities and gum disease, and in the case of methamphetamine users, often develop a condition known as "meth mouth".