

WHAT IS DRY MOUTH?

Dry mouth is the condition of not having enough saliva (spit) to keep your mouth wet. The technical term for dry mouth is Xerostomia. Everyone has a dry mouth once in a while, if they are nervous, upset and even under stress.

Dry mouth is **not** a normal part of aging. If you have a dry mouth all or most of the time, it can be uncomfortable and can lead to serious health problems. If you think you have dry mouth, see your dentist or doctor, there are things you can do to get relief.

Dry mouth is more than uncomfortable

- Dry mouth can be a sign of certain diseases or conditions, such as Sjogren's syndrome
- Dry mouth can cause difficulties in tasting, chewing, swallowing, and speaking
- Dry mouth can increase your chance of developing dental decay and other mouth infections
- Dry mouth can be caused by certain drugs or medical treatments

Why is saliva so important? 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 for you to chew and swallow
- Without enough saliva you can develop tooth decay or other mouth infections.

You also might not get the nutrients you need if you cannot chew and swallow certain foods.

Dry mouth symptoms include:

- 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, tough tongue
- Mouth sores and infections

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 the salivary glands might not be working right.

Sjogren's Syndrome is a major cause of [dry mouth](#). Other disorders can also cause dry mouth or affect the salivary glands. Some people feel a dry mouth even if their salivary glands are working correctly. Some with certain diseases, like Parkinson's disease or those who have suffered a stroke, may not be able to feel wetness in their mouth and may think their mouth is dry even though it is not.

Side effects of some medicines

More than 400 medicines can cause the salivary glands to make less saliva. However, do not stop taking them without asking your doctor, your dose may have already been adjusted to help protect you against drying side effects or chosen a drug that's least likely to cause dryness. These medications include:

- Antihistamines
- Decongestants
- Diuretics
- Some antidiarrhea drugs
- Some antipsychotic drugs
- Tranquilizers
- Some blood pressure medicines
- Antidepressants

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 dry mouth.

Nerve damage

Injury to the head or neck can damage the nerves that tell salivary glands to make saliva.

What can be done about dry mouth?

Dry mouth treatment will depend on what is causing the problem. If you think you have dry mouth, see your dentist or physician. He or she can try to determine what is causing your dry mouth.

- If your dry mouth is caused by medicine, your physician might change your medicine or adjust the dosage
- If your salivary glands are not working right but can still produce some saliva, your physician or dentist might give you a medicine that helps the glands work better
- Your physician or dentist might suggest that you use artificial saliva to keep your mouth wet

What else can I do?

- Sip water or sugarless drinks often. You should only take sips of water, drinking large amounts of liquid will not make your mouth any less dry. It will make you urinate more often and may strip your mouth of mucus, causing even more dryness
- Avoid drinks with caffeine. Drinks such as coffee, tea, and some sodas that contain caffeine can dry out the mouth
- Sip water or a sugarless drink during meals. This will make chewing and swallowing easier. It may also improve the taste of food

- Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless hard candy to stimulate saliva flow. Flavors such as citrus, cinnamon or mint-flavored candies are good choices. Take note, they must be sugar free because dry mouth makes you extremely prone to cavities
- Don't use tobacco or alcohol. They tend to dry out the mouth
- Avoid certain foods. Be aware that spicy or salty foods may cause pain in a dry mouth
- Use a humidifier at night

Better oral health: tips for keeping your teeth healthy

Remember, if you have dry mouth, you need to be extra careful to keep your teeth healthy. Make sure you:

- Gently brush your teeth at least twice a day
- Floss your teeth every day
- Use toothpaste with fluoride in it. Most toothpastes sold at grocery and drug stores have fluoride in them
- Avoid sticky, sugary foods. If you do eat them, brush immediately afterward
- Visit your dentist for a check-up at least twice a year. Your dentist might give you a special fluoride solution that you can rinse with to help keep your teeth healthy