

Do You Have Dry Mouth?

What is Dry Mouth?

Dry mouth, also called xerostomia, is a lack of saliva or spit. Everyone has dry mouth sometimes especially if you are nervous, upset, or under stress. But when a lack of saliva makes it difficult to swallow, it can lead to more serious dental problems. Saliva does more than just keep your mouth moist. It helps digest food, protects your teeth from decay, prevents infection by controlling bacteria in the mouth, and makes it possible for you to chew and swallow.

What Causes Dry Mouth?

Medications - Both prescription and over-the-counter medications are leading causes of dry mouth. Common types of medications that cause dry mouth are antihistamines, decongestants, pain relievers, diuretics, anti-depressants, and medications for high blood pressure.

Diseases - Health conditions that affect the salivary glands like diabetes, Hodgkin's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, HIV/AIDS, and Sjogren's Syndrome may lead to dry mouth.

Radiation Therapy - This type of cancer treatment on the head or neck areas may lead to saliva loss.

Chemotherapy - These cancer-treating drugs may cause your saliva to thicken or feel "ropey."

Menopause - Hormone changes can give women a persistent feeling of dry mouth.

Smoking - People who smoke can also experience dry mouth.

What Can You Do To Get Relief?

- Drink 2 percent or whole milk with meals. The fat helps you swallow food more easily.
- Use sugar-free candy or gum to help your mouth produce more saliva.
- Use a cool-air humidifier in your bedroom at night.
- Avoid alcohol and any mouth rinses that contain alcohol.
- Restrict your caffeine intake.
- Avoid smoking.

What Products Can Help With Dry Mouth?

Biotene can help to moisten tissues in the mouth and comes in toothpaste, mouth rinse, gels, and gum. These are available over-the-counter.

SalivaSure Tablets stimulate saliva flow with no adverse effects.

Sugar Free gum and mints have been shown to decrease the risk of cavities. Look for products that contain xylitol at local grocery or convenience stores.

Who Should You Tell You Have Dry Mouth?

Dental Providers - Your dentist and dental hygienist can diagnose any oral health problems caused by dry mouth. It is important to have good oral hygiene and have a dental exam at least every six months.

Physicians - Your doctor may be able to prescribe you a medication that does not cause dry mouth.

Pharmacists - Your pharmacist can tell you if dry mouth is a side effect from a medication you are taking.