



Dry Mouth Management

What are the causes of oral dryness?

Radiation therapy to the head and neck, chemotherapy, some diseases, and several medications may cause hyposalivation (reduction in salivary flow) and/or xerostomia (dry mouth). Dry mouth may be uncomfortable, lead to difficulty eating, swallowing and speaking. It can also increase your risk for tooth decay and fungal infections.

Below are some strategies to assist with the management of oral dryness. Always speak with your oral health provider if you have questions or concerns.

Over-the-counter dry mouth products

Several products are available in grocery stores, drug stores, and online. Due to differences in levels of oral dryness and the ability to make saliva, product recommendations are very personalized and may require a bit of trial and error to find what may work best for you.

Types of products include:

- **Salivary stimulants:** Promote increased production of your own saliva. May not be effective in patients with damaged salivary glands (i.e. those with history of radiation or Sjogren's). Examples: sugar-free gums, sugar-free lozenges
- **Saliva substitutes:** Temporarily moisten the mouth, but do not contain as many beneficial properties found in natural saliva. May come as liquid, sprays, or gels. Gels tend to be preferred at night and when mouth dryness is moderate-severe.

- **Alcohol-free mouthrinse:** Use of alcohol-free mouthrinses that contain fluoride may help combat tooth decay and temporarily improve oral dryness.
- **Prescriptions:** Medications (ie Pilocarpine and Cevimeline) are available that may be able to increase the amount of saliva that you make. These medications have side effects that are sometimes not well tolerated and are not appropriate for everyone.

Additional tips:

1. See your dentist regularly and maintain excellent oral hygiene. Dry mouth may increase your risk for tooth decay, bone loss, gum disease, and fungal infections. Keeping your mouth clean may help reduce risk and progression. Your dentist may consider prescribing a prescription-strength toothpaste which contains increased fluoride compared to over-the-counter toothpastes. Use as directed.
2. Avoid sugary foods or beverages which may promote tooth decay.
3. Stay hydrated. Dehydration may contribute to reduced saliva production. Consider drinking water with food to help with chewing and swallowing.
4. Avoid caffeine and smoking which may promote oral dryness.
5. Use water or oil-based lip moisturizer.
6. Consider the use of an air humidifier when the air in your home is dry.
7. For more information, we recommend visiting <https://www.aaom.com/oral-medicine-condition-information> and click on “Dry Mouth.”

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