

Dry Mouth



Dry Mouth (xerostomia) affects approximately 1 in 5 people. It is caused by a reduction of the flow of saliva in the mouth. The saliva flow normally decreases at night-time, but a lack of saliva flow becomes a problem if it permanently decreases.

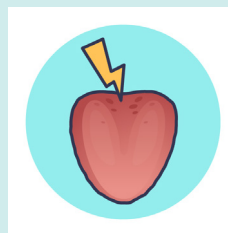
A dry mouth makes it harder to eat, speak and swallow. It increases the risk for tooth decay, gum disease and can even affect taste. Certain medications, illnesses or ageing can cause dry mouth. Saliva is secreted when we taste, chew, or think about food. Saliva plays an important role in keeping a healthy mouth.

Role of saliva

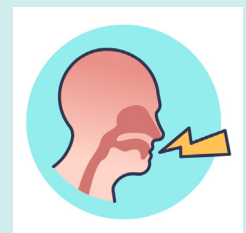
Saliva lubricates the mouth, which is important for speaking and for the digestive process. Saliva has antimicrobial characteristics and contains minerals that support the health of your teeth and gums. Saliva makes wearing a denture more comfortable too.

Signs and Symptoms

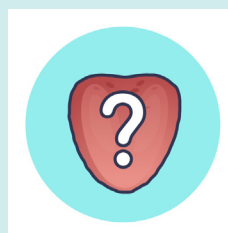
Some of the symptoms include:



Soreness of the
tissues in your mouth



Difficulty
swallowing/speaking



Altered taste



Dry lips

What causes dry mouth?

There are several causes of a dry mouth:

- use of medications
- dehydration
- mouth breathing
- radiation or chemotherapy of the head and neck
- autoimmune diseases
- nerve damage and other illnesses
- the emotional state
- personal habits, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and recreational drug use

Symptoms of a dry mouth include bad breath, soreness of the tissues in your mouth, a burning sensation, dry lips, altered taste, and difficulty with swallowing and speaking. Other symptoms as a result of the reduced saliva flow are fungal infections (oral thrush) or bleeding gums.

People who experience a dry mouth often try to relieve their symptoms with chewing gum or lollies and by drinking more. Using drinks or lollies with sugar increases the risk of tooth decay. It is better to choose sugar free alternatives.

Managing dry mouth

You can minimise the risk of tooth decay by cleaning your teeth (tooth brushing) and using a fluoride toothpaste. To strengthen your teeth you can add extra protection by rinsing with an alcohol free fluoride mouthwash.

The use of oral lubricants and saliva substitutes can provide relief as well. Sugar-free gum, mints or lollies can help you to feel comfortable, together with drinking plenty of water. Certain foods, like cucumber, can also help to moisturise your mouth.

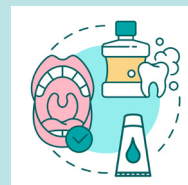
Smoking, drinking alcohol, rinsing with alcohol-containing mouthwash, caffeinated drinks, and salty or spicy foods often make the dryness and discomfort worse.

Together with your oral health professional you will be able to find out what works for you. You can discuss which tools, products and methods will help you to reduce the symptoms of dry mouth and keep your mouth healthy.



Brush twice a day

To remove food and soft plaque from your teeth reducing the risk of tooth decay.



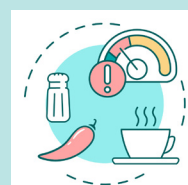
Saliva substitutes

Use oral lubricants and saliva substitutes for relief and to reduce dryness.



Reduce smoking and drinking

These can cause dehydration and increase dryness and discomfort.



Reduce triggering foods

Salty and spicy foods and caffeine can also make dryness and discomfort worse



Maintain regular dental visits

Regular visits to your oral health professional can identify and prevent future problems.

Together with your oral health professional you will be able to find out what works for you.

References

1. Carpenter G. *Dry Mouth A Clinical Guide on Causes, Effects and Treatments*. 1st ed. 2015. ed. Berlin: Springer; 2015.
2. Hopcraft M, Tan C. *Xerostomia: an update for clinicians*. *Aust Dent J*. 2010;55(3):238-44.
3. da Silva L, Kupek E, Peres K. *General health influences episodes of xerostomia: a prospective population-based study*. *Community Dent Oral Epidemiol*. 2017;45(2):153-9.
4. Mark A. *Limiting the effects of dry mouth*. *J Am Dent Assoc*. 2017;148(8):626