



DRY MOUTH

What it is, what causes it and what you can do to better manage it – we'll explain it all.

We all experience a dry mouth from time to time, usually due to intense thirst. When this happens, drinking a glass of water is the simple solution to restoring the moisture in your mouth. But for individuals living with xerostomia, also known as dry mouth, the symptoms, causes and effects on your health are much more complicated.

What is dry mouth?

Dry mouth occurs when saliva stops being produced. Saliva is a key part of a healthy mouth because it washes away food and other debris. This helps prevent infection by controlling bacteria and fungi in the mouth.* That's why, if left untreated, dry mouth can increase the risk of gum disease, tooth decay and mouth infections.**

What causes it?*

Dry mouth is not a disease. It can be a side effect of a medical condition or medication, such as:

- › Certain prescription and nonprescription drugs that are used to treat a wide variety of health issues like depression, anxiety and other psychological disorders, allergies and colds, asthma, epilepsy, hypertension, diarrhea, nausea and urinary incontinence.
- › A number of diseases: Sjögren's syndrome, HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's, diabetes, anemia, cystic fibrosis, rheumatoid arthritis, stroke and mumps.
- › Medical treatments such as surgical removal of the salivary glands, chemotherapy and damage to salivary glands from radiation to the head and neck.
- › Lifestyle behaviors like smoking, chewing tobacco and breathing with an open mouth.

What are the symptoms?*

- › Sticky, dry or burning feeling in the mouth.
- › Trouble chewing, swallowing, tasting or talking.
- › Cracked lips.
- › Sores or infections inside the mouth or on the tongue.

How is it treated?²

Taking care of dry mouth depends on what is causing it. But, generally speaking, there are a number of ways to help restore moisture to a dry mouth. These include:

- › Drinking plenty of water
- › Using sugar-free candy or gum to stimulate saliva flow.
- › Replacing moisture with artificial saliva and oral rinses.
- › Breathing through your nose – not your mouth.

If you think you have dry mouth, talk to your dentist or doctor.

He or she can try to determine what is causing your dry mouth and recommend the appropriate treatment.

* National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. "Dry Mouth", August 2014

** National Institutes of Health. "Dry Mouth: What Causes Dry Mouth?" October 2015

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