

ORAL HEALTH

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS



DRY MOUTH



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DID YOU KNOW?

Some people feel they have dry mouth even if their salivary glands are working correctly. People with certain conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease or those who have suffered a stroke, may not be able to feel wetness in their mouths.

Dry mouth is the feeling that there is not enough saliva in the mouth. Common causes of dry mouth in adults include side effects of certain medications and dehydration—whenever you lose more fluid than you take in.

Dry mouth can make it hard to chew, swallow, or even talk. Having less saliva also increases the risk of developing tooth decay or yeast (Candida or thrush) infections in the mouth because saliva helps keep harmful germs in check.

Dentures, mouthguards, or oral appliances can become uncomfortable and may not fit as well if the mouth is dry. Without enough saliva, they can rub against the cheeks, gums, or the roof of the mouth and cause sore spots.

It is important to know that dry mouth is not part of the aging process. Having dry mouth all or most of the time is not only uncomfortable but can lead to serious health problems. It can also be a sign of certain diseases, habits, or conditions. So, if you think you have dry mouth, see your dentist or physician—there are things you can do to get relief.

WHAT CAUSES DRY MOUTH?

- **Side effects of some medicines.** Hundreds of medicines can cause the salivary glands to make less saliva. For example, medicines for allergies, high blood pressure, and depression can cause dry mouth.
- **Dehydration.** Aging adults are more prone to dehydration than younger people.
- **Disease.** Diabetes, Sjögren's syndrome, and HIV/AIDS can all cause dry mouth.
 - Sjögren's syndrome is an autoimmune disorder in which immune cells attack and destroy the glands that produce tears and saliva.
- **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 the mouth to feel dry.
- **Nerve damage.** Injury to the head or neck can damage the nerves that tell salivary glands to make saliva.
- **Recreational or illicit drugs.** Use of recreational or illicit drugs can cause dry mouth and tooth decay.
- **Habits.** Snoring and breathing with your mouth open also can contribute to dry mouth.

■ WHAT IF YOU HAVE DRY MOUTH?

Make sure you visit a dentist or physician who can help determine what is causing the dry mouth and suggest appropriate treatments. If medications are causing dry mouth, your dentist or physician might advise changing medications or adjusting the dosages. Other treatments might include a medicine that helps the salivary glands work better or artificial saliva to keep the mouth wet.

YOU MAY ALSO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Sip water or sugarless drinks often, especially during meals. This will make chewing and swallowing easier. It may also improve the taste of food.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea, and some sodas. Caffeine can dry out the mouth.
- Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless hard candy to stimulate saliva flow; citrus, cinnamon, or mint-flavored candies are good choices. Some sugarless chewing gums and candies contain xylitol and may help prevent cavities.
- Avoid tobacco or alcohol use. They can make dry mouth worse.
- Be aware that spicy or salty foods may cause pain in a dry mouth.
- Use a humidifier at night.

- **TO MAINTAIN GOOD ORAL HEALTH, YOU SHOULD ALSO:**
- Gently brush with fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day, such as after breakfast and before bedtime.
- Floss daily.
- Avoid sticky, sugary foods, or brush immediately after eating them.
- Rinse with water after using an inhaler or taking any syrup-based medicines.
- Choose cough drops, vitamins, and antacid tablets that do not contain sugar.
- Use a fluoride mouth rinse that does not contain alcohol.
- Consider a fluoride treatment, if offered by your dental or medical provider. This helps to protect your teeth against tooth decay.



VISIT THE DENTIST REGULARLY

You should visit the dentist even if you have no remaining natural teeth. See the dentist right away about any changes in your mouth, such as sores, pain, swelling, or bleeding gums.



To learn more, scan the code using your smartphone camera app, or visit:

hrsa.gov/oral-health

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