



Frequently asked questions about dry mouth



What is dry mouth?

Dry mouth is a condition that many people do not recognise and its effects can be serious. It is caused by a reduction in the amount of saliva (spit) in the mouth. It is quite common, and can often be experienced as a sustained and increased thirst and/or a stickiness in the mouth. It can feel as though your tongue is getting stuck to the roof of your mouth, and chewing, swallowing and speech can be affected. You may be drinking more fluids than normal, and possibly more sweet drinks.

It is important to speak to your health professional if you feel you are experiencing dry mouth. It is also very important to keep your mouth clean, but more of that later.

If dry mouth is not managed, it can cause problems such as tooth decay, mouth infections, hoarse voice, changes in taste and even disruption to sleep, among other things. Overall, it can dramatically affect your quality of life.

What is the cause of dry mouth?

Dry mouth is associated with a number of conditions, such as diabetes and Sjogren's syndrome, and therapies, including chemotherapy, and radiotherapy to the head and neck. It is also associated with commonly prescribed medications, such as medication to control epilepsy, allergies (including hay fever), high blood pressure, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Why is saliva important?

We need adequate amounts of saliva to lubricate our mouths to enable chewing, swallowing and speech. We also need saliva to:

- wash away food debris and bacteria from the mouth
- supply minerals such as calcium, phosphorus and fluoride to repair early signs of tooth decay, and neutralise the acidity levels of the mouth due to consumption of highly acidic foods and drinks
- fight against any bacteria that may cause disease and infection.



How does dry mouth affect oral health?

Dry mouth can have a serious impact on oral health. Without the essential actions of saliva, there is a greater risk of increased:

- tooth decay
- gum infections e.g. gingivitis and periodontitis
- mouth infections e.g. oral thrush
- loss of enamel due to consumption of acidic foods and drinks
- sore teeth.

How can I relieve my dry mouth symptoms?

- Sip on water
- Avoid salty, acidic and sugary foods and drinks
- Chew on sugarless gum two to three times a day to stimulate saliva flow
- Reduce or give up smoking
- Limit alcohol
- Limit drinks containing caffeine e.g. tea, coffee,
- cola, energy drinks

Why is tooth decay (cavities) a problem?

Tooth decay is one of the world's most common health problems. If left untreated, tooth cavities (holes) can get larger and affect deeper layers of your teeth. This can lead to toothache, infection and tooth loss. In some cases, it can cause serious infection that enters the bloodstream and can be fatal.

For more info click here: [Alliance for a Cavity Free Future](#)

How can I look after my teeth and gums to protect them from the effects of dry mouth?

1. Good oral hygiene practices are essential - such as brushing your teeth twice a day
2. Regular dental check ups with an oral health professional
3. Speak to your pharmacist for off the shelf solutions such as saliva-like substitutes and toothpastes that do not contain sodium lauryl sulphate
4. Choose water over other drinks - tap water (in most of Australia) has fluoride in it which protects your teeth

More information at:

Evident:

<https://www.evident.org.au/oral-health-information>

Better Health:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/dry-mouth-syndrome>

Health Engine

<https://healthengine.com.au/info/dry-mouth-xerostomia>

Mayo Clinic:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dry-mouth/symptoms-causes/syc-20356048>

Web MD:

<https://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/dental-health-dry-mouth#1>