

Dry Mouth (Xerostomia)

If you experience any of the following symptoms, you may have problems with saliva.

- High tooth decay rate
- Dry mouth or have trouble swallowing
- Sip water frequently whilst eating or talking
- Suffer from burning tongue or lips
- Have abnormal tastes (salty, bitter)
- Trouble with denture retention

Role of Saliva

Saliva is secreted mainly by three paired glands (parotid, submandibular & sublingual) in addition to many small accessory glands distributed throughout the mouth. It consists mainly of water but contains many electrolytes and proteins. Many functions have been attributed to saliva and these include:

- Lubrication and oral cleansing
- Antimicrobial properties
- Buffering of acids and bases
- Remineralization of teeth
- Chewing, swallowing and speech
- Taste and digestion

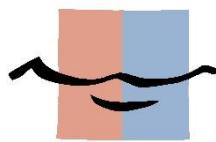
As many as 1 in 4 adults suffer from dry mouth. In most cases, however, there is no great clinical significance.

Causes of decreased Saliva

- Over 400 commonly prescribed medications can cause a dry mouth
- Patients respond differently to medications so therapy may need individual adjustment
- Therapeutic irradiation in the treatment of cancer in the mouth region
- Rheumatoid diseases such as Sjogren's Syndrome
- Other systemic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus and hormonal imbalance.
- Inflammation or blockage in a major salivary gland
- Psychogenic disorders, e.g., depression and stress
- Low fluid intake and/or fluid loss from exercising, i.e., sweating

Saliva and Tooth Decay

Saliva plays a protective role in preventing tooth decay. Saliva dilutes and clears carbohydrates, helps neutralize acids and provides the ions for tooth remineralization. Saliva is particularly effective in remineralization especially in conjunction with fluoride. With decreased saliva, there is an increase in tooth decay, especially at sites less prone to decay, e.g., lower front teeth, gum line areas, around recent fillings and on biting edges.



More consequences of decreased Saliva

- Dry mouth and increased thirst
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing and speech
- Sore or “burning” mouth and dry throat
- Altered taste acuity
- Cracked lips and fissured tongue
- Difficulty with denture retention
- Tender or sore salivary glands
- Increased incidence of candidiasis
 - Denture sore mouth & Oral thrush
 - Cracked corners of the mouth cracked (Angular cheilitis)
- Increased incidence of tooth decay (Dental Caries)
- Halitosis (bad breath)

Management of a Dry Mouth

The causes of oral dryness should be determined and treatment should be directed towards eliminating these if possible. Symptomatic measures may also be necessary:

- Use sugar free gum (Extra™, V6™ or Freedent™) or sugar free lozenges
- Sip water frequently or try artificial saliva, e.g., **Biotene™**
- Try milk as a saliva substitute when eating
- Hard “tasty” cheeses are salivary stimulants
- Drugs to stimulate salivary flow are available -- best to consult a specialist in Oral Medicine
- Ask your Doctor to consider changing your medication if you are on long term therapy
- Try toothpastes without sodium lauryl sulphate (foaming agent). e.g., **Biotene™** toothpaste
- A recent product is **Biotene™** Mouth spray which we have had great feedback from some patients

The following points should be noted:

- Use fluoride rinses or gels to help reduce dental decay. The use of custom made fluoride trays is beneficial.
- Make sure you brush and floss your teeth thoroughly -- after each meal if possible.
- Have dental assessments, professional cleaning and fluoride treatments on a regular basis.
- Reduce the amount of sugar containing foods consumed especially soft drinks
- DON’T SUCK ON SWEETS TO KEEP YOUR MOUTH MOIST!!!
- Remember that cough lozenges also contain sugar - even Fishermans Friends™!!
- Have sugar free gum and/or “tasty” cheese after meals.
- Use milk. It provides moisture and lubrication as well reducing decay by buffering acids, reducing enamel solubility and promoting enamel remineralization. (Please note the paradoxical situation whereby continual long term exposure to milk causes decay such as in infants allowed to sleep with their bottle.)
- Try Vaseline™ or lanolin for dry lips.
- Consult your Dentist or Doctor if you suspect any oral candida infections.
- Soak dentures daily in a chlorhexidine solution and clean them after each meal.