



Dry mouth

Your mouth needs healthy saliva to keep you and your mouth healthy

What is dry mouth?

Dry mouth is a condition that results from a reduced amount of saliva that is not enough to keep the mouth wet. Dry mouth can make it difficult to speak, eat and swallow food. If you have a dry mouth often, it can be uncomfortable and may lead to health problems.

What causes dry mouth?

The main causes are side effects of prescribed medicines, diseases such as Sjögren's syndrome and diabetes, radiation or chemotherapy treatments for head and neck cancers, hormone disorders, smoking, alcohol, stress and infections.

What can go wrong with a dry mouth?

Saliva is 'nature's mouthwash'. It helps protect your teeth by washing away decay-causing acids. The minerals in saliva help to maintain tooth enamel. It helps stop infections by controlling bacteria and fungus in the mouth. It also keeps the mouth moist and fresh and softens food, making it easier to chew and swallow. Not enough saliva in the mouth can;

- Increase the risk of dental decay, gum disease and infections.
- Cause sores in the mouth; split skin at the corners of the mouth; cracked lips and ulcers.
- Make chewing, swallowing and speaking difficult.
- Reduce taste and smell.
- Make wearing dentures difficult.
- Contribute to bad breath.

What can you do to help a dry mouth?

- Drink or sip tap water often.
- Suck on ice chips or chew sugar-free sweets or sugar-free gum.
- Eat chewy foods to encourage saliva flow and chew foods thoroughly before swallowing.
- Lubricate the mouth before eating and brushing.
- Use bicarbonate of soda mouthwash to rinse as needed (half a teaspoon to a glass of warm water).
- Use a humidifier at night when sleeping and keep your lips moist.
- Take out partial or full dentures while you sleep, keep them clean and regularly checked for any areas that are irritating to the gums.
- Avoid caffeine, tobacco and alcohol and use alcohol-free products.
- Maintain good daily oral hygiene; use a fluoride toothpaste to brush your teeth twice-a-day, morning and night.
- Visit your dental practitioner regularly for check-ups, for advice on your medications and the types of products to use to help with a dry mouth.

For further information please discuss with your dental practitioner

Would you like more information or to provide feedback?

This document can be made available in alternative formats such as braille, audio tape or electronically on request.



Communications Officer, Dental Health Services
Locked Bag 15, Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983



(08) 9313 0555



publications@dental.health.wa.gov.au



www.dental.wa.gov.au

Any images used in this document are for illustrative purposes only, as they are only offered as a general guide.



© 2020 Dental Health Services WA. All rights reserved.