



# Dry Mouth

## What is Dry Mouth?

Everyone has a dry mouth once in a while - if they feel nervous, upset or stressed. A dry mouth is felt when there is not enough saliva to keep the mouth wet. 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 drugs, diseases (such as Sjögren's syndrome where the immune system destroys tissues in the glands which produce saliva) and radiation treatments for head and neck cancers. Diabetes can also cause dry mouth.

## 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 ulcers in the mouth
- Make chewing, swallowing and speaking difficult
- Reduce taste and smell
- Make wearing dentures difficult
- Increase the risk of aspiration pneumonia in certain people

## What can you do to help a Dry Mouth?

- Drink or sip tap water often
- Suck on ice chips or chew sugar-free gum or sweets
- Eat chewy foods to encourage saliva flow, and chew foods thoroughly before swallowing
- Avoid caffeine, tobacco, and alcohol and use alcohol-free products e.g. alcohol-free mouthwash
- Use bicarbonate mouthwash to rinse as needed (half a teaspoon to a glass of warm water)
- Use a mouth spray (water mixed with olive oil or grape-seed oil in a spray bottle) to spray in the mouth, or on dentures before inserting
- Use a humidifier at night when sleeping and keep your lips moist
- Use dental products as advised by your health/dental professional
- Maintain good oral hygiene using fluoride toothpaste twice daily

**Your mouth needs healthy saliva to keep you and your mouth healthy, talk to your health professional about your medications and visit your dental practitioner regularly.**

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