

Xerostomia

(Dry Mouth)

Many people who suffer from dry mouth, or Xerostomia (pronounced “zero-stoh-me-a”) exhibit one or more of the following symptoms:

- The need to moisten their mouth frequently
- Mouth is dry at bedtime
- Less saliva is present than before
- Difficulty swallowing
- Trouble eating foods such as crackers or toast

Most cases of dry mouth are caused by the failure of the salivary glands to function normally.

However, in some people dry mouth occurs even though their salivary glands are normal.

Although dry mouth is not a disease itself, it can be a symptom of certain diseases or conditions.

Dry mouth is also a common side effect of some prescription and over-the-counter medications and medical treatments.

• What happens when you have dry mouth?

Patients with dry mouth have a range of discomfort and symptoms. Some people do not realize that they have less saliva, but it is brought to their attention during a dental visit. Medicine taken at bedtime with side effects occurring during sleep may not be evident the following morning. A physician may change a drug or dosage and the patient may not realize the significance of a change on the oral cavity. Some people feel a dry or burning sensation in their mouths or an inability to chew, taste, swallow and speak. In the absence of saliva, which has antibacterial and antiviral properties, bacteria in the mouth runs rampant, making the teeth more susceptible to decay and the gums more susceptible to infection. Severe cases of dry mouth can include symptoms such as splitting or cracking of the lips and/or corners of the mouth, changes in the surface of the tongue, rampant tooth decay, ulceration of the mouth’s linings, and infection.

• What causes dry mouth?

MEDICATIONS--Over 500 drugs list dry mouth as a potential side effect. The main culprits are antihypertensives and antidepressants. Pain-killers, tranquilizers, diuretics and antihistamines can also decrease saliva. Some herbal remedies may cause dry mouth as well as some ingredients in muscle enhancing and weight reducing items. We have available a list of both prescription and over-the-counter medications/cures that may cause or aggravate this condition.

CANCER TREATMENT—Radiation therapy can permanently damage salivary glands if they are in the field of radiation. Chemotherapy can change the composition of saliva, creating a sensation of dry mouth.

DISEASES—Sjogren’s Syndrome is an autoimmune disorder whose symptoms include dry mouth and dry eyes.

OTHER—Bone marrow transplants

• Why is saliva important?

Saliva has many important functions in the body and each person needs an adequate amount to:

- 1) Limit the growth of bacteria that can cause tooth decay and other oral infections.

- 2) Preserve teeth by bathing them with protective minerals that allow early cavities to remineralize and heal.
- 3) Lubricate the soft tissues lining the mouth to keep them pliable and make speaking and chewing easier.
- 4) Lubricate food so it can be swallowed and assist in digestion.

• **What relief is available?**

Although there is no single way to treat dry mouth, there are dry mouth products that are specifically manufactured for the symptoms of dry mouth. We especially want our patients with dry mouth to use products with extra fluoride such as Period Med rinse, Omni Gel, Control toothpaste and Cavity Shield fluoride treatments. Also available are products that help ease the symptoms of dry mouth such as toothpaste, mouthwash, oral gel and a special gum and lubricating spray. One brand that we are familiar with is Biotene. There are also a number of steps you can follow to keep teeth in good health and relieve the sense of dryness:

- Brush your teeth after each meal
- Use dental floss daily
- Avoid sticky, sugary foods
- Schedule your cleanings at least 3 times a year
- Take frequent sips of water and avoid drinks with caffeine
- Drink frequently while eating
- Keep a glass of water by your bed at night
- Avoid tobacco and alcohol
- Avoid spicy or highly acidic foods such as sodas and citrus
- Eat celery, cucumbers, carrots, apples, melons or any other high water content fruit or vegetable.

In Summary: dry mouth is a significant health problem that contributes to tooth decay and other mouth infections. Dry mouth is the hidden cause of gum disease and tooth loss in 3 out of every 10 adults. Dry mouth may indicate a more serious problem in your body.

Call us at 727-785-4716 if you have any questions or concerns!