



## What You Need To Know About Dry Mouth

Feeling a little parched every once in a while is perfectly normal. Your mouth may feel dry when you are nervous, under stress, upset, or even just outside in the heat for a long period of time. The good news is that these situations are just temporary. However, if your mouth feels dry on a daily basis it may be a sign of an underlying problem and if left untreated could lead to further complications to your health.

Dry mouth, also known by its medical name, “xerostomia” is a condition characterized by either a lack of saliva or a decreased flow of saliva. Although, rarely viewed as an essential body fluid, your saliva plays an important role in aiding digestion and maintaining good dental health.

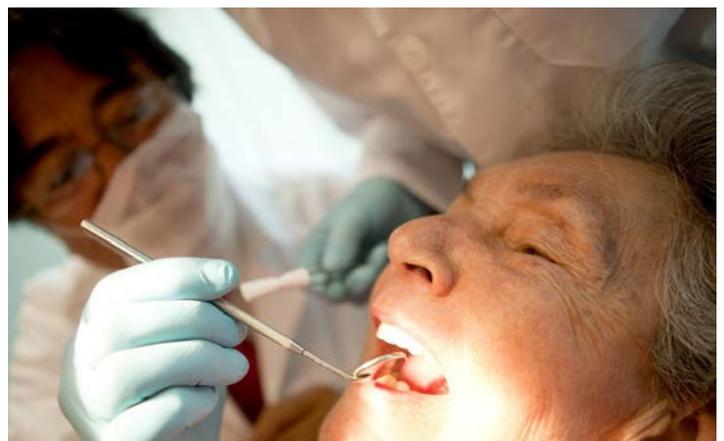
The average person makes an astonishing amount of saliva each day. Three pairs of major salivary glands and hundreds of minor salivary glands inside your mouth produce approximately 2-4 pints of saliva every 24 hours. Saliva is about 99% water and 1% electrolytes, enzymes and proteins. These components act together to wash over your teeth and the surrounding soft tissues to protect them from germs, tooth decay, and gum disease. Your saliva also plays a key role in keeping your mouth lubricated and comfortable, so that you can move food through your mouth to chew, taste and easily swallow.

When you don't have enough saliva the simple acts of chewing, swallowing as well as speaking can become difficult. A lack of saliva causes germs to increase in your mouth. More germs lead to bad breath, dental decay, gum disease, and provide the groundwork for a host of oral infections.

It is not uncommon for a dentist to see a patient with dry mouth and the problems associated with it. Xerostomia can be caused by a number of factors. Although anyone can be afflicted with dry mouth, it is most often seen in elderly individuals.

Some of the common causes of dry mouth include:

- Medication:** Hundreds of medications, both prescription and over-the-counter-drugs, can cause or exacerbate xerostomia.
- Age:** Xerostomia is seen more frequently in older individuals due to the increased number of medications that they take and the likelihood of



being afflicted with a contributing medical condition.

•**Disease:** Certain diseases including salivary gland diseases, diabetes, hormonal imbalances, sleep apnea, cystic fibrosis, mumps, and autoimmune disorders can cause dry mouth. Depression and anxiety can also play a role in xerostomia.

•**Cancer Treatment:** Radiotherapy to the head and neck can result in damage to the salivary glands. Also chemotherapy can affect the amount and composition of the saliva.

•**Injury or Surgery:** Salivary gland removal, nerve damage, trauma to the head and neck, blockage of the ducts by a salivary stone, or an infection can cause xerostomia

•**Tobacco**

•**Dehydrati**

**on**

Your dentist and your physician will work together to help you deal xerostomia and the problems associated with it. As with all conditions treatment depends on the underlying cause of the problem. If your dry mouth happens to be a side effect of using a particular drug, an alternative medication may be recommended. In some cases dry mouth may respond to medications that promote an increased salivary flow. If not, artificial saliva can be used to keep your mouth moist and lubricated. Moreover, your dentist may recommend a prescription strength fluoride gel to help prevent tooth decay from developing.



In the meantime, if you are suffering from dry mouth there are several things that you can do on your own to alleviate the discomfort and avoid further problems. It is important to drink water more often and avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol that may have a dehydrating effect. You can also help to stimulate or increase the saliva flow by chewing on sugarless gum or sucking a sugarless candy.

Of course, the best way to deal with all issues that can affect your dental health is to practice excellent oral hygiene and visit with your dentist on a regular basis for care

