

# What you need to know about chronic dry mouth

## Facts about saliva

- The average healthy young person produces a quart of saliva a day.
- Saliva is 99% water.
- The final 1% contains many important proteins, enzymes, and electrolytes.
- Saliva lubricates food and medicine to help make swallowing safe and comfortable.
- Nutrients in saliva strengthen teeth, preventing them from becoming brittle.
- Antibacterial proteins impede the growth of bacteria, reducing risk of cavities and infection.
- Saliva starts the digestion of some sugars right in the mouth.

## Chronic dry mouth can cause many problems

- Thick saliva that is hard to swallow.
- Mouth sores or cracked lips.
- Tooth decay and gum disease.
- Oral thrush (yeast infection in the mouth or throat).
- Reduced ability to taste food.
- Trouble chewing or swallowing.
- Pain when swallowing dry food or medication.
- Difficulty talking due to dry or sore tongue or lips.
- Voice problems due to dehydration.
- Trouble wearing dentures.

## Xerostomia is the medical term for chronic dry mouth

- Pronounced like “zero-STOW-me-ah”.
- People are more likely to experience it as they get older, with 45% of people over the age of 80 experiencing it.
- Women are twice as likely as men to have xerostomia. This is more common after menopause.

## Common causes of chronic dry mouth

- Side effect of certain medications.
- Dehydration.
- Tobacco, alcohol, or recreational drug use including caffeine.
- Radiation therapy for head and neck cancer.
- Chemotherapy.
- Bone marrow or stem cell transplantation.
- Infection in the mouth, such as thrush.
- Nerve damage from injury or surgery.
- Autoimmune diseases like Sjogren's syndrome or HIV/AIDS.
- Diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, cystic fibrosis.
- Sleep apnea or chronic sinusitis.
- Problems associated with aging.

## Many medications can cause chronic dry mouth

Here are just a few examples of medication that can cause dry mouth. (Always follow your doctor's or pharmacist's instructions for taking your medications.)

- Anticholinergic medications such as atropine, ipratropium, or tiotropium.
- Sedating antihistamines such as Benadryl, chlorpheniramine, or hydroxyzine.
- Tricyclic antidepressants such as amitriptyline, desipramine, or imipramine.
- Antipsychotic medications such as clozapine, chlorpromazine, or olanzapine.
- Antiarrhythmics such as mexiletine, disopyramide, or procainamide.
- Anti-Parkinson's medications such as amantadine, trihexyphenidyl, or orphenadrine.
- Anti-urinary incontinence medications such as oxybutynin, flavoxate, solifenacin, tolterodine, or trospium.
- Opioids such as morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, or fentanyl.

## Tell your doctor

- Dry mouth could be a symptom of an underlying problem.
- If dry mouth is a side-effect of a medication, your doctor may change the dosage or the medication itself.
- Your doctor may prescribe medication to stimulate saliva.

## Avoid these foods, drinks, etc

- Caffeine (coffee, tea, soda, energy drinks)
- Alcohol
- Alcohol-based mouthwash
- Sugary foods and drinks
- Acidic food and drinks
- Dry, hard, crunchy foods
- Sticky foods
- Spicy foods
- Tobacco, marijuana, or methamphetamine

## Choose these foods and drinks

- Water. Try sipping constantly throughout the day. (Follow your doctor's advice.)
- Caffeine-free and sugar-free beverages.
- Soft food. If needed, add sauce, gravy, or condiments so that it's not dry.
- Look for xylitol in your foods and drinks containing sweeteners. Xylitol is a natural sweetener that inhibits the bacteria that cause cavities. Consuming large amounts of xylitol may cause diarrhea or cramps in some people
- Other sweeteners that are recommended include carboxymethylcellulose and hydroxyethyl cellulose

## Mouth care tips

- Use a toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- If you use mouthwash, choose an alcohol-free version.
- Use saliva substitutes.
- Use a wax or lanolin-based lip balm. Find one with sunscreen.
- Try over-the-counter products for dry mouth relief. There are many products, here are a few:
  - Act Dry Mouth lozenges and moisturizing gum
  - Biotene Dry Mouth rinse, spray, and gel
  - Dr. Brite Dry Mouth spray
  - Oasis moisturizing mouthwash, spray
  - OraCoat XyliMelts (can use during the day and while sleeping).

## Tips for swallowing medication

- Take a sip of water before you put the pill in your mouth.
- Place the pill towards the back of the mouth, then wash it down with water.
- Try drinking from a bottle or straw, instead of from a cup.

## If you still have trouble swallowing pills

**Talk to your pharmacist** for guidance on these possible options:

- A tablet form may be substituted for a capsule form. Capsules are harder to swallow because they are usually lighter and stickier when they get wet.
- Cutting a pill in half could make it easier to swallow. Not all pills work when cut.
- Using a pill lubricant gel or spray can be helpful. These products can't be used with all medications.
- Place the pill whole or crushed in applesauce or pudding. Not all medications can be taken with food.
- Substitute a liquid, chewable, or powder form of the drug, if possible.

## Other things you can try

- Carry water with you and sip it frequently.
- Chew sugar-free gum.
- Suck on ice chips or sugar-free hard candy.
- Keep water next to your bed.
- Breathe through your nose instead of your mouth.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier when you sleep.
- Ask your doctor before using over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants, which dry you out.

## Professionals that may be able to help

- Your pharmacist could identify medications that may be causing dry mouth.
- Your medical provider could determine the cause of the dry mouth and provide treatment.
- Your dentist may recommend a prescription fluoride toothpaste, a fluoride rinse, or a fluoride gel that you brush on your teeth before going to bed. You should also see your dentist at least twice a year for regular check-ups and cleanings.

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