



Xerostomia Facts

Xerostomia is the medical term for a dry mouth due to a lack of saliva.

Symptoms may include:

- Sticky, dry feeling in the mouth
- Trouble chewing, swallowing, tasting or speaking
- Burning feeling in the mouth
- Dry feeling in the throat
- Cracked lips
- Dry, rough tongue
- Mouth sores
- Infections in the mouth

Why is saliva so important?

Saliva does more than keep the mouth wet.

- It helps digest food.
- It protects teeth from decay.
- It prevents infection, including gum disease, by controlling bacteria and fungi in the mouth.
- It makes it possible to chew and swallow.

Causes & Treatment

The main causes of xerostomia include:

- Stress and anxiety
- Side effects of drugs, alcohol, medications or chemotherapy
- Trauma to the salivary glands, ducts or nerves
- Dehydration
- Excessive mouth breathing
- Previous radiation therapy
- Natural result of aging

Xerostomia may also be a sign of an underlying problem or disease, such as vitamin deficiencies, Sjögren's syndrome or poorly controlled diabetes, but this is not always so.

It is important to consult with your physician and dentist if you are experiencing any symptoms of xerostomia. Treatment involves finding any correctable causes and fixing those if possible. When the cause can't be determined or can't be resolved, treatment focuses on relieving the symptoms and preventing cavities.

Managing Xerostomia

Here are some suggestions to help manage your xerostomia:

- Sip water regularly
- Use a dry mouth fluoride toothpaste
- Use 100% Xylitol gum or 100% Xylitol mints to stimulate salivary flow while helping reduce bacterial count
- Use over the counter saliva substitutes
- Pay careful attention to oral hygiene
- Visit your dentist regularly for cleanings or periodontal maintenance
- Breathe through your nose, not your mouth
- Use a humidifier at night to increase air moisture
- Avoid toothpastes that contain Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS)
- Avoid the use of decongestants and antihistamines
- Avoid smoking or spit tobacco
- Avoid acidic foods, carbonated drinks, caffeinated drinks and alcohol
- Avoid sugary foods and candy