

Dry Mouth: Tips and Treatments

A dry mouth may not sound like a health threat, but that parched feeling can contribute to tooth decay and gum trouble, as well as discomfort when eating or speaking.

Dry mouth occurs when the glands in the mouth that make saliva don't function properly. Many common medications such as blood pressure drugs, antidepressants, drugs to treat urinary incontinence, and pain relievers can dry out your mouth. So can autoimmune disorders, chemotherapy for cancer treatment, or radiation therapy of the head and neck.



Protective Saliva

Saliva not only helps defend against periodontal (gum) disease and tooth decay, but also helps in digesting and swallowing food, cuts bacteria levels in the mouth, and contains minerals that help renew the surface of the teeth.

Saliva also contains buffering agents, enzymes, and minerals that keep teeth strong and play a crucial role in maintaining a healthy environment in the mouth.

Without the cleansing and shielding effects of adequate salivary flow, tooth decay and gum disease become more common.

Signs, Symptoms and Treatment

People with dry mouth may have a dry feeling in the throat, mouth sores, bad breath, cracked lips, and a dry, rough tongue.

To ease the problem:

- Tell your dentist about all medications you take and if you have symptoms of mouth dryness. Your dentist may recommend using products with fluoride to help protect your teeth or give you a medication to help your body make saliva.
- Sip water, suck on sugarless candy or ice chips, chew sugarless gum, or try over-the-counter artificial saliva products to keep your mouth moist.
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine and other items that dry your mouth. Among them: alcohol (even in mouthwash) and tobacco.
- Use a humidifier in your bedroom when you sleep.
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Drugs Linked to Dry Mouth

The following drugs are just some of the many that can cause dry mouth:

- Antidepressants
- Antihistamines

- Decongestants
- Diuretics
- High blood pressure drugs
- Muscle relaxants
- Pain relievers
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