

Managing a dry mouth (Xerostomia)

Helpful hints and suggestions

Symptoms of a dry mouth:

- dry and/or sticky mouth
- difficulties chewing, swallowing and speaking
- sore or painful mouth
- food or saliva debris

Common causes of a dry mouth:

- dehydration
- some medications
- mouth breathing
- radiotherapy/chemotherapy
- oxygen use
- certain health conditions

Managing a dry mouth (xerostomia):

- Sip on plain water regularly throughout the day and keep water at your bedside.
- Replace missing saliva with salivary substitutes. Ask your pharmacist, doctor or dentist for product recommendations.
- Stimulate saliva with sugar-free chewing gum.
- Avoid spicy, dry or hard crunchy foods as these will be difficult to eat and may cause irritation. Take small bites and eat slowly.
- Eat soft creamy foods such as casseroles, soup, ice cream and fruits such as melon or grapes. Moisten foods with gravies and sauces as these will make it easier to eat. You may find that cold foods and drinks are more soothing than hot foods/drinks.
- Many medications have a side-effect of causing dry mouths. If you are suffering with this condition, please speak to your doctor to assess the situation.
- Always take water or non-alcoholic drinks with meals.

Protect against dental caries by avoiding sugary foods/drinks and by:

- Reducing sugar intake (avoid snacking and eating last thing at night).
- Avoiding sticky foods such as toffees or chewy sweets.
- Keeping your mouth very clean (twice daily tooth brushing and interdental cleaning with either floss or interdental brushing).

- Use a fluoride toothpaste and try to spit out the residue rather than rinsing this away.
- Using dry mouth products such as gels, sprays or mouthwashes regularly, especially before going to bed. Speak to your doctor/pharmacist about the best products for you.
- Ensure you have regular dental check-ups.

Protect against thrush and halitosis (bad breath) by:

- keeping your mouth very clean
- rinsing twice daily with a fluoride mouth wash
- keeping your mouth as moist as possible
- protecting your lips with a SPF lip salve
- keeping dentures out at night*

*If you have dentures, ensure these are removed overnight and cleaned a minimum of twice daily. These can be disinfected in denture cleansing tablets as required.

Further questions

This leaflet has been designed to answer many of the common questions and concerns regarding a dry mouth. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask a member of the medical or nursing staff or contact:

Mouth Care Lead Nurse

Tel: 01342 414000 ext. 6610

Maxillofacial Unit

Tel: 01342 414000 ext. 4708

Our usual opening times are Monday to Friday 8.30am – 5pm

Useful weblinks:

- <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dry-mouth/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/DryMouth/?_ga=2.133362574.1299248338.1496662412-953047903.1496662412

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or an alternative format.