



Rex F. Miller, DMD, PC

570 Blackstone Alley,
Jacksonville, OR 97530

Do you have dry mouth?

Dry mouth, also called xerostomia, results from inadequate saliva flow from the saliva glands into the mouth. Dry mouth is a symptom rather than a specific disorder. Adequate saliva flow lubricates the mouth, cleanses the mouth and begins the digestive process as food is chewed. When salivary flow is reduced, harmful organisms are allowed to grow in the mouth. For some people, the sensation of having a dry mouth is simply a nuisance. For others, the condition causes serious health problems. Left untreated, dry mouth can lead to oral yeast infection, a burning sensation, rampant tooth decay, bad breath, and other oral health problems.

Specific Problems:

Drying irritates the soft tissues of the mouth, which can make them inflamed and more susceptible to infection. Without the cleansing and shielding effects of adequate saliva flow, tooth decay and gum disease become more common.

Causes of Dry Mouth:

Prescription medications and over-the-counter medications are the most common cause of dry mouth. These include antihistamines, decongestants, painkillers, diuretics (normally used to lower blood pressure), antihypertensives (used also to lower blood pressure), and antidepressants. Dry mouth is a potential side effect of so many medications. Read the literature that accompanies your medications to discover if dry mouth is likely to occur. If you think a medication is causing dry mouth, tell your prescribing physician. In some cases, a different prescription may provide adequate therapy and relief from dry mouth. Dry mouth may also result from radiation treatment for head and neck cancers, salivary gland disease, emotional stress and autoimmune diseases such as diabetes and Sjogren's syndrome. Hormonal alterations associated with pregnancy and menopause also have been associated with dry mouth.

Getting Relief:

Increasing fluid intake sometimes can lessen or alleviate the burden of dry mouth. Your dentist or physician may recommend using artificial saliva – available at local pharmacies – to keep your mouth moist.

Other remedies include:

- sugar-free gum or candy to stimulate salivary flow;
- frequent sips of water;
- alcohol-free oral rinses;
- restricted intake of caffeine, alcohol and carbonated beverages.

Regular dental checkups and cleanings are very important, too. Tell your dentist what medications you are taking and other information about your health that may help identify a solution to your oral dryness. Taking good care of your teeth and gums is critical if you have dry mouth. This will minimize decay and gum disease. Brush twice a day and floss at least once a day to remove debris from between teeth where your toothbrush cannot reach. Your dentist may recommend additional fluoride products to help control tooth decay.