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What is Dry Mouth?

Patients with lowered saliva flow can have a wide range of discomfort and symptoms.

Signs of Dry Mouth (Xerostomia) include:

- Your gums, tongue or mouth of roof feel “dry.”
- Your gums, tongue or mouth have a “burning sensation.”
- You have a “dry mouth” at bedtime.
- You need to moisten your mouth frequently.
- You generally have less saliva than before.
- You have difficulty swallowing.
- You have difficulty eating dry foods such as crackers or toast.

Serious cases of dry mouth can also have: splitting or cracking of the lips (and/or corners of the mouth), changes in the surface of the tongue, rampant tooth decay, ulceration of the mouth’s linings, and serious periodontal infection.

What causes Dry Mouth?

A recent study of 6000 elderly Floridians found 39% complaining of Dry Mouth. Dry Mouth can be caused by a number of factors. Some patients are genetically predisposed to lowered saliva flow and others develop the condition as age sets in. Certain diets and lifestyles can also cause Dry Mouth. These include:

- Sleeping with your mouth open
- Not drinking enough fluids that result in general dehydration.
- Eating/drinking certain things such as highly caffeinated drinks or alcohol, foods which are sticky, sugary, spicy, or highly acidic.
- Use of tobacco products.
- Anxiety, mental stress, or depression.
- Certain prescriptions and over-the-counter medications.

Medications Can Cause Dry Mouth

Dry mouth is a common side effect of many prescriptions and over-the-counter medications. Over 400 common drugs list Dry Mouth as a side effect. The main culprits

are: anti-depressants, anti-anxiety drugs, anti-psychotics, anti-histamines, anti-inflammatory, weight-loss drugs, decongestants, anti-convulsants, anti-Parkinson's disease, strong pain killers, tranquilizers, diuretics, radiation treatment and chemotherapy. It is good idea to check the label of medications you are taking to see if Dry Mouth (Xerostomia) is listed as a side effect.

Dry Mouth Causes Tooth Decay and Periodontal Infection

Saliva washes the teeth with protective minerals and limits the growth of bacteria in the mouth. Without adequate saliva (Dry Mouth) bacteria grow more rapidly. There is also less saliva to protect your teeth and gums. The results can be serious, including:

- More dental decay and cavities
- More bacteria getting under the gums causing periodontal infection.
- Greater accumulation of bacteria causing bad breathe
- Bacteria accumulating on the rough surfaces of teeth and restorations.

How Can I Protect My Oral Health?

If you have Dry Mouth, Your body's ability to fight oral bacteria and prevent decay is greatly lowered. You have a more serious dental condition and it is VERY IMPORTANT that you:

- Maintain good oral hygiene, including brushing after every meal and flossing daily.
- Have dental or periodontal cleanings done three or four times a year.
- Have dental or periodontal checkups at least once a year.
- Closely follow the instruction of your dentist. This includes not delaying treatment recommended by your dentist.

What Else Can I do?

Although there is no single way to treat Dry Mouth, there are mouth products that are specifically manufactured to relieve the symptoms of Dry Mouth. These include special toothpastes, mouthwashes, oral gels, oral lozenges, and chewing gum. If you have symptoms of Dry Mouth, mention this to your dentist and he/she will be able to suggest the best course of action for you. You can also:

- Take more frequent sips of non-caffeinated drinks during the day.
- Drink more frequently while eating.
- Keep glass of water by your bed at night.
- Eat more high water content fruits and vegetables(e.g. celery, cucumbers, apples, and melons.
- Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless hard candy.

A Final Note

While dry mouth can come on gradually, it should not be ignored. This is especially true if you are taking a drug that lists Dry Mouth as a side effect. Please consult with your physician or dentist if you have symptoms of Dry Mouth.