

Xerostomia

dealing with a dry mouth

Xerostomia or 'Dry Mouth'

A healthy adult produces about half a litre of saliva every day. We usually don't give much thought to it until we experience a dry mouth. Drying irritates the soft tissues in the mouth, which can make them inflamed and more susceptible to infection and other oral health problems.

What Does Saliva Do?

- Makes it easier to talk
- Aids in digestion
- Prevents tooth decay by washing away debris and food
- Neutralises damaging acids in plaque
- Enhances ability to taste
- Helps with swallowing
- Can repair microscopic tooth decay

Common Symptoms of a Dry Mouth

- A sticky, dry feeling in the mouth or throat
- Limited saliva that seems thick or stringy
- Burning sensation in the mouth
- Trouble chewing, swallowing or speaking
- An altered sense of taste
- Rough, dry tongue
- Cracked lips, sores or split skin at the corners of the mouth
- Mouth infections
- Increased plaque on teeth, tooth decay and gum disease
- Bad breath

Finding Relief

Good care of your teeth and gums is critical in decreasing the chance of tooth decay and other mouth problems. Brush your teeth twice a day and floss in between teeth once a day. A good technique will help to remove the food and plaque.

More Ways to Help

- Increase your fluid intake, take frequent sips of water during the day
- Use an artificial 'saliva substitute' or oral moisturiser. Your Dentist can prescribe one or see your Pharmacy.
- Avoid tobacco
- Restrict intake of caffeine, alcohol and carbonated drinks.

What Causes a Dry Mouth?

On occasion, everybody will suffer from a temporary dry mouth – it may happen when we are nervous, stressed or upset.

When a dry mouth happens most or all of the time, it can have serious consequences for your oral health.

Common Causes

- Certain medications
- Emotional stress
- Anxiety disorders
- Radiation treatment for head and neck cancers
- Salivary gland disease
- Endocrine disorders
- Diabetes
- Stroke
- Hormone changes in pregnancy and menopause
- Snoring
- Mouth breathing
- Certain diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and AIDS

