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What is Dry Mouth?

Dry mouth, also called **xerostomia** (ZEER-oh-STOH-mee-ah), is the condition of not having enough saliva, or spit, to keep the mouth wet. Dry mouth can happen to anyone occasionally—for example, when nervous or stressed. However, when dry mouth persists, it can make chewing, eating, swallowing and even talking difficult. Dry mouth also increases the risk for tooth decay because saliva helps keep harmful germs that cause cavities and other oral infections in check.

Causes

Dry mouth occurs when the salivary glands that make saliva don't work properly. Diseases such as diabetes, Parkinson's disease and Sjögren's syndrome (an autoimmune condition that affects mainly women), can affect the salivary glands. Other causes of dry mouth include certain cancer treatments, damage to the glands' nerve system and infection.

Some of the more common medications that can cause dry mouth include:

- Bronchodilators
- Decongestants
- Diuretics
- Muscle relaxants
- Narcotic analgesics
- Sedatives
- Antianxiety
- Antihypertensive
- Antidepressants
- Antiparkinsonian

Treatment

There are different ways of treating dry mouth and its effects depending on the cause. You may be advised to use one or more of the following:

Saliva substitutes as needed eg. Biotene, Oral Balance, Optimoist, Xero-lube

For remineralization:

Remineralizing mouth rinse – rinse 1 minute and spit out

Remineralizing gel – brush on all tooth surfaces and leave for 1 minute

For cavity prevention:

Neutral sodium fluoride gel (1.1%) – brush teeth for 1 minute and do not eat or drink for 30 minutes or apply with a custom tray for 5 minutes

Stannous fluoride gel (0.4%) – brush teeth for 1 minute and do not eat or drink for 30 minutes

Sodium fluoride mouth rinse (0.05%) – rinse for 1 minute and do not eat or drink for 30 minutes

For plaque control:

Chlorhexidine mouth rinse (0.12%) – rinse for 1 minute and spit out and do not eat or drink for 30 minutes.

There are also self-care steps you can take to help manage dry mouth such as drinking plenty of **water**, chewing **sugarless gum** or sugarless candies, and **avoiding** tobacco and alcohol.

If you have dry mouth it is very important that you maintain good oral care at home by **brushing** after every meal and **flossing** at least every day as well as using a **water-pik** and brushing your **tongue**. You will need to maintain the more frequent regular **dental check-up schedule** we recommend for you to keep your teeth and gums healthy and so that potential problems are recognized early.