

Maxillofacial Department

Xerostomia (Dry mouth)

What is Xerostomia?

Xerostomia is a condition which affects the flow of saliva, causing the mouth to feel dry.

The functions of saliva

- It lubricates the mouth to keep teeth clean and fight decay
- It contains enzymes which break down food allowing easier swallowing
- It aids taste and speech

The symptoms of a dry mouth

- Thick and sticky saliva
- Experiencing a burning sensation and sensitivity to certain foods
- Soreness
- The mouth lining becoming red and shiny

The causes

There are many different causes, for example:

- A side effect of medication
- The result of medical treatment e.g. radiotherapy
- Advancing age
- The result of a medical condition e.g. diabetes



How can I relieve the symptoms?

There is no way to prevent this condition but we can ease the symptoms by

- Sipping sugar-free fluids
- Stimulate saliva with sugar free gum or sweets
- Avoid spicy or dry foods
- Eat soft creamy foods e.g. soups, casseroles or foods with a high liquid content e.g. melon, grapes or ice-cream
- Gently massaging the salivary glands to stimulate saliva flow

Products to use

There are gels and sprays which are designed to provide moisture and comfort. There are toothpastes and mouth rinses especially formulated to help with oral hygiene. Your GP, dentist or pharmacist can advise you about these.

As there is a higher risk of dental decay in a dry mouth it is important to visit your dentist regularly.

Getting help

If you think you may have Xerostomia, go to your doctor or dentist for advice.

Adapted from: - British Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. Available from, <http://www.baoms.org.uk/>

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