

AGD:FACTSHEET FOR THE PATIENT

Compiled for you by GlaxoSmithKline



DRY MOUTH

What is dry mouth?

Dry mouth, or xerostomia, is a condition that results from reduced saliva flow. The condition is estimated to affect millions of people in the United States. Saliva is vital to everyday processes, such as tasting, swallowing, speech, and digestion. Saliva also helps defend against tooth decay and bacterial, fungal, and viral infections. The components of saliva protect teeth and oral soft tissues and facilitate speech and swallowing.

What are the causes of dry mouth?

Many commonly prescribed medications can cause a decrease in salivary function. These medications include antihistamines, antidepressants, antipsychotics, antihypertensives, anti-inflammatories, diuretics, sedatives, and narcotics. In total, there are more than 400 medicines that may cause dry mouth. Medications are the cause of more than 90 percent of dry mouth cases.

Dry mouth also may be the result of Sjögren's syndrome, a disorder of the immune system in which white blood cells attack the moisture-producing glands. Other conditions may cause dry mouth, including diabetes, lupus, kidney diseases, stress, anxiety, depression, nutritional deficiencies, or a dysfunction of the immune system, such as caused by HIV/AIDS. In addition, nerve damage or trauma to the head and neck from wounds or surgery can damage the nerves that supply sensation to the mouth.

Certain cancer treatments can alter the flow and composition of saliva, resulting in dry mouth. Radiation and

chemotherapy treatments to the head and neck region can permanently damage the salivary glands, significantly reducing saliva production or halting it altogether.

What are the signs and symptoms of dry mouth?

Symptoms of dry mouth may include:

- increased need to sip or drink fluids when swallowing
- difficulty speaking
- difficulty with swallowing
- a burning or sore sensation in the mouth
- an inability to eat certain foods
- diminished or altered sense of taste
- increased susceptibility to oral infection
- sleep interruptions due to thirst
- difficulty wearing dentures
- tooth decay
- gingivitis
- stale or bad breath

How can I manage dry mouth symptoms?

There are a variety of methods available for managing symptoms of dry mouth. Your dentist may advise changes in your diet; using salivary substitutes and over-the-counter salivary mouthwashes, gels, and sprays; and speaking to your physician about changing the dose or brand of your medications. For more information, talk with your dentist.

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