

FACT SHEET: WHAT IS DRY MOUTH?

Dry mouth (sometimes called xerostomia) is the feeling that there is not enough saliva in your mouth. At some point, everyone feels the symptoms of dry mouth, but for some people this problem can be persistent and unpleasant and can lead to health problems.

Why is saliva important?

Saliva has many important functions. Saliva helps to keep the mouth comfortable; it acts as a lubricant whilst eating and speaking; it helps us taste and digest food. Saliva also keeps the teeth, the gums and the lining of the mouth healthy.

What health problems can dry mouth cause?

Apart from feeling uncomfortable or painful, a dry mouth can lead to:

- Difficulty in speaking, chewing and swallowing
- An altered sense of taste
- Tooth decay and tooth erosion
- Infections in and around the mouth
- Difficulties wearing dentures
- Sleep disturbances

What causes dry mouth?

There are many different causes of dry mouth and it may be due to a combination of different factors. The most common causes are:

- Some medications (especially sedatives, anti-psychotics, anti-depressants, diuretics and antihistamines)
- Dehydration
- Some medical conditions (such as diabetes and Sjögrens syndrome)
- Anxiety
- Radiotherapy to the head and neck
- Menopause

What can I do to manage my dry mouth?

There are lots of things you can do to help control and manage your dry mouth. Please see our fact sheet "Care of a Dry Mouth" and speak to your doctor or dentist.

