



## Dry Mouth may be a Warning Sign of a Serious Problem



By: Dr. Diane G. Nogalo, D.D.S.

Dry Mouth, also called Xerostomia is a problem that affects more than 4,000,000 Americans. Dry Mouth is exactly what it sounds like; it is a condition in which the body does not produce enough saliva to keep the mouth moist. The symptoms of dry mouth include but are not limited to: "dry, sticky" feeling in mouth, constant sore throat, altered taste of foods, burning sensation in the mouth, and the tongue feeling rough or "thick."

If you occasionally have dry mouth do not be concerned, however, if your dry mouth is persistent (several days a week) contact your dentist or physician. This condition can lead to, or is a sign of, serious health problems and has several different causes.

People can experience dry mouth for several different reasons from medications to head trauma. Unfortunately the side effect of over 400 medications including antihistamines, decongestants, painkillers and diuretics, antipsychotic drugs (i.e.: Paxil, Zoloft, Xanax and Valium), and some blood pressure medications will result in a dry mouth. Radiation therapy or chemotherapy can also affect the mouth by decreasing salivation. Diseases such as Sjogren's syndrome, HIV/AIDS, Diabetes and Parkinson's also play a role. A patient who has experienced

nerve damage due to a head or neck injury may produce less saliva than they should. This can lead to chronic dry mouth.

Treating dry mouth or xerostomia is important because saliva plays an important role in food digestion, the ability to swallow and chew, preventing tooth decay, and keeping bacteria levels in the mouth balanced. Reduced saliva flow can prevent the body's immune system from fighting infection in the mouth. A major concern for a patient with dry mouth is oral cancer. Every patient should have an oral cancer screening annually.

What should I do if I think I have dry mouth? First, contact your physician and inform them that you are

experiencing dry mouth. A change in your medication dosage or a change in the medication may be needed. Also notify your dentist of the changes in your mouth and of your medications at each visit, even if you think they are not related. Sipping water throughout the day to keep yourself hydrated is extra important if you suffer from dry mouth. Avoiding caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea and soda is important because caffeine is a natural diuretic which can contribute to the symptoms of dry mouth. Do not use tobacco or alcohol. You can also use a saliva substitute to help keep the mouth wet during the day. Saliva substitutes come in various forms and may alleviate some discomfort. Decrease the use of mouth rinses such as Listerine and Scope that contain a higher con-

centration of alcohol causing more irritation. Also using a humidifier at night may help relieve the symptoms as well.

How do I keep my teeth healthy if I have dry mouth? Because bacteria thrives in a dry environment, xerostomia increases the incidence of decay (cavities), making it imperative to maintain an excellent homecare regimen. Brushing your teeth gently twice a day, flossing once daily, avoiding sugary foods and visiting your dentist at least twice a year for a check-up are all things that will help keep your teeth and mouth healthy. Due to the increase in tooth decay more frequent dental visits may be in order. Fluoride plays an important role in fighting tooth decay, which can be available in toothpaste and rinses. Although the average toothpaste contains fluoride, a higher concentration or "prescription strength" level fluoride is generally recom-

mended. Opt for Alcohol-free rinses such as Biotene and Oxyfresh products and inquire with your dental professional about the products that best meet your particular needs and symptoms. Avoid beverages with a high level of sugar such as milk, juices, and soda. If consumed, drink at once versus sipping throughout the day. Choose sugar-free gum, or products containing Xylitol (Trident) that have cavity fighting properties, sugar-free mints all of which will help encourage salivation.

Education and prevention play such a role in treating this condition. Always advise your clinicians of medication changes, know your medication's affects and keep current with your dental and medical appointments. The oral cavity can tell us so much about what is going on in our bodies, don't ignore the signs. Remember, Prevention is the key to a healthier lifestyle.

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Dr. Nogalo feels her approach has been welcomed by consumers. My patients have been so pleased with their care here that they invite their friends and family to join as well. She believes strongly in using only tried and true techniques that assure patients good results. I don't believe in using the latest fads.

I have not only invested into the physical facility, but also in building a team committed to excellence in this profession. Each one of my team has special talents and we have all dedicated ourselves to practicing what we preach here by empowering ourselves through education and striving to live healthy lifestyles.

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