

DRY MOUTH (XEROSTOMIA)

Treatments for head and neck cancer, particularly radiation treatment, can damage the glands in your mouth that produce saliva, resulting in dry mouth (xerostomia). Dry mouth can be a significant side effect of treatment, impacting your oral health and your ability to chew, swallow, taste, and speak.

SIDE EFFECTS OF DRY MOUTH

Patients experiencing dry mouth may:

- Need to drink more water, especially while eating
- Find it hard to chew or swallow food
- Find that foods and liquids taste different
- Have thickened or discolored (brown or yellow) saliva
- Experience changes in the sound of their voices
- Find it hard to wear dentures
- Experience oral yeast (candida) infections
- Experience problems with their oral health including cavities, bleeding, or infections, as well as an increased risk for progressive tooth damage, dental abscess, gum inflammation and gum disease

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE DISCOMFORT

- Ask your doctor about medications that may reduce or prevent dry mouth by helping to protect your salivary glands during treatment and/or help maintain or stimulate saliva production.
- Maintain good daily oral hygiene, which may include high strength fluoride, remineralizing products, and antibacterial products.
- See your dentist regularly (every 3 to 4 months).
- Stay hydrated. Carry a water bottle whenever possible, and try to drink at least 64 oz of fluids every day.
- Suck on sugar-free hard candy, especially tart flavors, or chew sugar-free gum. Look for products containing xylitol.
- Moisten food with sauces, gravies, or dressings. Limit foods that are dry or hard to swallow, such as peanut butter, tough meats, and breads.
- Avoid alcohol, and limit caffeine.
- Use alcohol-free mouthwash, especially those specifically intended for dry mouth (e.g., Biotene or Oasis), and saliva substitutes.
- Apply wax or lanolin-based lip balms with sunscreen.
- Sleep with a humidifier in your room to alleviate nighttime discomfort.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DONATE, VISIT
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