

Dry Mouth

Reduced saliva flow that results in a dry mouth (xerostomia) is a common problem among older adults.

Until recently, dry mouth was regarded as a normal part of ageing. We now know that healthy older adults produce as much saliva as younger adults do.

However, certain diseases and many medications used to treat common medical problems in older adults, can dry the mouth. Examples of such medication include; high blood pressure drugs, antidepressants, painkillers, diuretics, antihistamines and decongestants.

Having a dry mouth:

- makes it hard to eat, swallow, taste, and speak;
- may lead to gum disease and dental decay, and eventually to tooth loss;
- may make it harder to keep dentures clean;
- may cause dentures to feel uncomfortable in the mouth.

What can you do if you think you have dry mouth?

- 1) Talk with your dentist or doctor.
- 2) Ask your dentist about the use of artificial saliva, oral rinses and special toothpaste to moisturize and lubricate your mouth.
- 3) You can relieve dry mouth by:
 - Taking frequent sips of water,
 - Pausing often when speaking to drink some liquid,
 - Avoiding beverages with caffeine (e.g. coffee, cola drinks),
 - Avoiding sugary snacks,
 - Chewing sugar free gums, mints or candies to stimulate saliva flow,
 - Avoiding tobacco and alcohol,
 - Avoiding or limiting spicy, sour or crunchy food that may irritate your mouth,
 - Using mouthwashes without alcohol in them. Alcohol tends to dry the mouth.

Doing these things will not only relieve dry mouth and help correct bad breath, it will also help you to prevent tooth decay, periodontal disease and oral cancer.