

DRY MOUTH

DRY MOUTH, OR "XEROSTOMIA", IS AN ORAL IMBALANCE IN WHICH AN INADEQUATE AMOUNT OF SALIVA CAUSES AN INCREASE IN TOOTH DESTRUCTION AND DECREASED TOOTH HEALTH. SALIVA PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN PRESERVING TOOTH STRUCTURE BOTH BY DECREASING THE RISK OF TOOTH DECAY AND BY PROTECTING TEETH FROM WEAR AND ACID EROSION. IT ALSO HYDRATES ORAL TISSUES, PROTECTING THEM FROM BACTERIAL AND FUNGAL OVERGROWTH. DECAY, WORN TEETH AND UNHEALTHY ORAL TISSUES MAY BE SYMPTOMS OF DRY MOUTH.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What causes Dry Mouth?

Some people are at higher risk than others for producing too little saliva. The following conditions can upset your body's balance and put you at higher risk for dry mouth:

- age – salivary flow naturally decreases over your lifespan
- diet – excessive caffeine or alcohol intake inhibits salivary flow
- medications – many prescription drugs have the side effect of decreasing salivary flow
- radiation treatment – head and neck radiation treatment may decrease or eliminate salivary gland function
- medical conditions – certain diseases as well as salivary gland tumors will decrease salivary flow

2. What can I do to reduce my Dry Mouth problem?

Your dentist can evaluate your individual risk factors and customize a Dry Mouth Management Protocol for you. Once you have your protocol, it is up to you to carry out its important steps on your own.

Here are some things you can do at home:

- apply special water based lubricants to protect your teeth and tissues
- use sugar free mints or chewing gum to stimulate salivary flow
- use a humidifier while sleeping to prevent your mouth from drying out
- use oral medication to stimulate salivary flow
- learn more about the intake of caffeine and alcohol as well as the intake of water and other rehydrating fluids

3. What will happen if I choose to do nothing about my Dry Mouth?

If your oral imbalance is left unaddressed, continuing dry mouth will put you at a much higher risk for many oral diseases. Severe tooth decay often results in infection requiring either root canal treatment or tooth extraction. Even with adequate tooth brushing, patients with dry mouth may experience bad breath. The risk of mouth sores and loss of tooth structure due to wear and acid erosion also increases.

