



Dry Mouth

Online version with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/drymouth>

Dry Mouth

(Xerostomia is the medical term)

occurs when the salivary glands do not make enough saliva, or spit, to keep the mouth moist. Saliva is needed for chewing, swallowing, tasting, and talking, these activities may be difficult with a dry mouth.

Chemotherapy causes dry mouth by making saliva thicker. This is usually a temporary symptom that may resolve within 2-8 weeks after treatment ends.

Radiation therapy to the head, face, or neck may also cause dry mouth. It can take six months or longer for the salivary glands to start producing saliva again. Some people notice dry mouth improving during the first year after radiation treatment, others will continue experiencing some level of long-term dry mouth. This is especially likely if the salivary glands were in the area of the radiation therapy.

Some medications may also cause dry mouth.

The following tips may help you manage dry mouth and prevent dental problems:

- Visit a dentist before starting radiation treatment or chemotherapy to check the health of your mouth and teeth. If you need to have teeth removed, it should be done at least 3 weeks before treatment so your mouth can heal.
- Brush your teeth after each meal and at bedtime with a soft-bristle toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Soak the brush in warm water to make the bristles even softer AND floss gently once a day.
- Rinse your mouth 4 to 6 times a day, especially after meals.
- Rinse or gargle with a solution of either 1/4 teaspoon of salt or 1 teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup (8 ounces) of warm water. Follow with a plain water rinse.
- Drink sips of water throughout the day. Carrying a bottle of water may help you drink more frequently
- Avoid mouthwashes and other dental products that contain alcohol.
- Saliva substitutes or mouth rinses designed for dry mouth are available without a prescription.
- Saliva may be stimulated by chewing gum or sucking on sugar-free or sour candy.
- Use a cool mist humidifier, especially at night.
- Avoid alcohol and drinks with caffeine (such as coffee, tea, and cola),
- Avoid acidic, spicy, salty, coarse, and dry foods.
- Eat soft, moist foods that are cool or at room temperature.
- Moisten dry foods with broth, sauces, butter, oil or milk.
- Do not smoke or chew tobacco.
- Avoid sticky, sugary foods and drinks.
- Some dentists or doctors may also prescribe medicines to increase saliva or rinses to treat infections in the mouth.

Content adapted from websites below.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Mouth Dryness or thick saliva](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Dry Mouth or Xerostomia](#)
- [Chemocare, Dry Mouth](#)
- [ASCO answers, Dental and Oral Health](#)
- [CancerCare.org, the Importance of Dental Health](#)
- [NIH, Chemotherapy and Your Mouth](#)
- [NIH, Head and Neck Radiation Treatment and Your Mouth](#)
- [NIH, Dry Mouth](#)
- [NIH, Oral Complications of Chemotherapy and Head/Neck Radiation \(PDQ®\)](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Problemas en la boca y en la garganta](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Sequedad en la boca o xerostomía](#)
- [Chemocare, Sequedad bucal](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Resequedad de la boca](#)