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DRY MOUTH (XEROSTOMIA)

INTRODUCTION

Dry mouth is a common condition that affects people of all ages. It is characterised by a lack of saliva in your mouth and has a variety of causes.

WHY IS SALIVA SO IMPORTANT?

Saliva is quite a complex fluid and had a number of important roles.

Your mouth needs saliva to be able to work properly. Saliva is your mouth's lubricant and it contains enzymes which help to break down your food and help you to swallow. It also acts as a cleanser, constantly washing around your mouth and teeth, helping to keep your teeth clean and fight decay. Other ingredients are responsible for killing bacteria, fungi and viruses.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DRY MOUTH?

- Difficulty in eating dry foods
- Pain or discomfort on swallowing
- General mouth discomfort
- Poor taste
- Denture problems
- Increased tooth decay
- Mouth and salivary gland infections
- Speech difficulties

WHAT CAUSES A DRY MOUTH?

There are a variety of causes for dry mouth as shown below and these can affect anyone.

- Dry mouth on waking in the morning may be due to mouth breathing.
- A variety of prescription drugs from your doctor can reduce saliva flow. These include treatments for conditions such as depression, hayfever, nausea, high blood pressure.
- Women who are going through menopause and taking HRT may suffer from dry mouth.
- Dehydration, perhaps due to infections, diarrhoea and vomiting, or uncontrolled diabetes.
- Previous radiotherapy to the head and neck can damage the salivary glands and decrease saliva flow.
- Dry mouth may be associated with other conditions such as Sjögren's Syndrome, which in turn may be associated with rheumatoid arthritis and related conditions.
- The sensation of a dry mouth, but with NORMAL saliva production, is a common complaint and is often related to anxiety, depression or stress.

WHAT PROBLEMS DOES A DRY MOUTH CREATE?

- The sensation of dry mouth is unpleasant and can be painful.
- Dry mouth can lead to difficulties in eating, swallowing and speaking.
- Without the protective benefits of saliva, you are also at greater risk of dental decay, infections and general soreness of the mouth as a result of inflammation and ulcers.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

Unfortunately, there seems to be no way of actually preventing the problem. Therefore, it is important to have regular dental check up and to maintain your mouth very well, especially since you are at a higher risk of dental decay and gum disease.

- Brush your teeth and gums regularly and effectively using a fluoride toothpaste, at least twice a day.
- Watch the amount of sugar you consume in your diet and try and limit this to meal times.
- Visit your dentist regularly and ask for advice on diet, fluoride supplements, fissure sealants and artificial salivas.

- Frequent sips of water throughout the day will help keep your mouth moist.
- Eating fresh fruit will also help to stimulate saliva production.
- Chewing sugarfree chewing gum will help stimulate natural saliva flow and relieve the symptoms of a dry mouth. It is particularly beneficial in helping to reduce tooth decay after meals or snacks.
- Artificial saliva sprays and moisturising gels may provide slightly longer lasting relief. However, none of these will feel or function exactly like natural saliva.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Examples products designed to combat xerostomia are the bioXtra range. This includes a moisturising gel, mild anti-bacterial toothpaste, alcohol-free mouthrinse, sugar-free lozenges and non-stick dental sugar-free gum

Bio-X Healthcare
Louvain-la-Neuve
Belgium

Web site: www.bioxhealthcare.com

- The British Sjögren's Syndrome Association (BSSA) is a patient self-help organisation which aims to inform patients about Sjögren's Syndrome in particular and also dry mouth in general. They are a patient self-help group group that was initially set up to help patients with Sjögren's Syndrome. However, because dry mouth is such a common condition, the Association is keen to help all those people who suffer from dry mouth problems, whatever the cause.

They organise meetings and publish regular newsletters.

For further information or to join, contact:

British Sjögren's Syndrome Association
PO Box 15040
Birmingham B31 3DP

Web site: www.bssa.uk.net