

## **Xerostomia (dry mouth)**

### **What is xerostomia (pronounced ‘zerostomia’)?**

Xerostomia, commonly referred to as dry mouth, is a condition in which there is usually, but not always, a decrease in the amount of saliva being produced by special tissues in your mouth. This condition, when present, can create a significant number of problems, such as difficulty in speaking, eating, and talking.

### **What causes dry mouth?**

There are a number of reasons that one might suffer from this condition. The most common reason for people to experience xerostomia is from taking multiple medications. The risk increases as the number of medications that a person takes increases. Additionally, there are certain types of medications which are more likely to cause this problem. These include medications for high blood pressure, anti-seizure medications, and medications for depression/anxiety, and other mood related disorders.

Other reasons for having a dry mouth can be related to a variety of underlying medical conditions, such as the autoimmune disorder Sjogren’s Syndrome, Sarcoidosis, Type-II diabetes, as well as those who have had radiation therapy for head and neck cancers.

### **Why is saliva important?**

Saliva has a number of important functions. As mentioned, the lack of saliva can lead to difficulty in speaking, eating, and talking. Saliva lubricates your mouth, and helps you to do these important functions. Saliva also helps to prevent the formation of cavities, by protecting the teeth, especially after eating meals, when there is an increase in susceptibility to acidic attack.

### **What can I do if I think I have this problem?**

Currently, there are no definitive means for correcting the problem of dry mouth. There are a number of investigations underway, which are looking for ways to definitively treat this condition, and it is expected that, in the very near future, there will be some form of corrective therapy for certain groups (i.e., those with Sjogren’s Syndrome, cancer patients who have had radiation therapy).

For now, most treatment is directed at relieving the discomfort through non-corrective measures. Some of the options that are available include the following: rinsing frequently with water, oral mouthrinses, gels, and chewing gum, salivary substitutes, medications that stimulate salivary flow, and certain forms of acupuncture. The type of treatment recommended depends on the reason for your dry mouth. Ask your dentist what treatment they recommend for you.