



A guide to...

Xerostomia – A dry mouth

Patient Information

How to contact us

Speech and Language Therapy
Watford General Hospital
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Vicarage Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD18 0HB

Tel: 01923 244 366. Ext: 7477 Email: westherts.adultslt@nhs.net

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 198** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.net**



Author	Joanne Jack
Department	Speech and Language Therapy
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Causes of Xerostomia

Xerostomia, or dry mouth, can be caused by health conditions, medications and dehydration.

Health conditions can include depression, Parkinson's disease, stroke, neurological operations, Alzheimer's disease, brain tumour, Sjogren's disease or Bell's palsy, and is often experienced after radiotherapy and chemotherapy.

Medications can include antidepressants, anticholinergics, antipsychotics, antihypertensives and antihistamines.

Saliva has seven major functions

- Mixes with food while chewing to turn it into a bolus (ball of mashed food) for ease of swallowing
- Lubricates tongue and lips during speech
- Cleanses teeth and gums and assists with oral hygiene
- Regulates acidity in the oesophagus
- Destroys micro-organisms and clears toxic substances
- Helps with taste
- Helps aid digestion.

What should I do?

- Keep mouth clean and moist
- Drink plenty of water, carry a bottle of water and sip it throughout the day
- Always rinse the mouth with plain water after eating
- Brush your teeth after every meal as you are more likely to suffer from tooth decay and/or gingivitis
- Brush with a soft bristle toothbrush
- Use dental floss at least once a day
- Use a lip balm to prevent cracking and dryness
- Chew sugarless gum or suck sugar-free sweets to stimulate saliva
- Limit alcohol intake
- Keep your intake of drinks which contain caffeine to a minimum eg: tea, coffee and fizzy drinks
- Have a moist soft diet and add sauces and gravy
- Eat foods that are nutrient rich and dense
- Treat any oral sores or infections as soon as they occur and follow advice given
- Use an oral lubricant. Consider over the counter artificial saliva, dry mouth spray, gel or pastilles. Ask your local pharmacy or GP for recommendations.

What should I avoid?

- Avoid mouthwashes containing alcohol or hydrogen peroxide as these have a drying effect on the mouth
- Avoid sucking sugary sweets as they can worsen fungal infections and lead to dental decay
- Avoid eating food that is very hot
- Foods that are very acidic, spicy, salty or sugary may cause irritation
- Do not smoke
- **Do not stop** taking a prescribed medicine without getting medical advice first – even if you think it might be causing your symptoms. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist about your symptoms.

A note on some foods...

- **Teas**, such as such lemon or ginger tea can increase saliva production. However, some teas such as hibiscus and rosehip can leave the mouth feeling drier.
- **Ginger** increases bile flow, intestinal movement, saliva and gastric juice production. Good for loss of appetite, bloating and flatulence.
- **Pineapple, kiwi** and **papaya** may aid digestion. The enzymes or acidity of these fruit break down proteins and can thin down mucus or thick saliva. Remember eating acidic foods may increase your risk for developing dental decay. So, it is important to brush your teeth afterwards and to only eat them in moderation rather than throughout the day.