

Patient information

Dry mouth (xerostomia)

Dry mouth or xerostomia can be caused when the salivary glands in your mouth do not make enough saliva to keep your mouth wet. It is often due to the side effects of radiotherapy, chemotherapy or medication. It can impact on comfort, speaking, eating, drinking, intimacy and oral hygiene.

Tips for managing a dry mouth

- Carry a bottle of water everywhere you go
- Sip water frequently throughout the day and at night if you feel dry
- Spray your mouth with water using an atomiser bottle – you can buy small atomiser spray bottles from most chemists
- Try artificial saliva products to help moisten your mouth (ie Oralieve gel or mouthspray, Biotene Oral Balance gel, Xylimelt Lozenges®). Speak to your oncology team, your GP or a pharmacist if you would like further information. Some of these can be bought over the counter or put on repeat prescription.
- Try steaming frequently with a bowl of hot water
- Try sucking ice chips
- Try using a humidifier in your bedroom at night, or place a bowl of water near a radiator to add moisture to the air
- Try to avoid alcohol and drinks that can irritate a dry mouth – this includes caffeinated drinks (tea / coffee) or citrus drinks (orange or pineapple)
- Use lip salves to protect your lips
- Try to avoid smoking – speak to your local smoking cessation team or GP if you are thinking about quitting

- Try to avoid toothpastes with foaming agents in them, as they can make your mouth dry. Foaming agents are usually an ingredient called sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS). There are specific toothpastes available for people with a dry mouth (ie Oralieve toothpaste).
- Ask your doctor or nurse whether you are taking any prescribed medicines that can cause a dry mouth – it may be possible to reduce the dosage or change the drug.

Stimulating saliva

- Try chewing sugar-free gum or gums that contain Xylitol eg Spry® gum
- Xylimelts can be placed on your gums to help stimulate saliva
- Try some sharp-tasting (sour) sugar-free sweets
- During mealtimes, think about environmental factors – use strong smells and make sure food looks appealing. This can help trigger the brain to produce more saliva.

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Information also taken from 'Managing the late effects of head and neck treatment'
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