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Arrowhead Lakes Dentistry Newsletter

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[Understanding Dry Mouth](#)

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Dry Mouth, or its medical name, xerostomia, is a feeling of abnormal dryness in the mouth, often caused by a decrease in saliva production. Dry Mouth is not always a consequence of the aging process; it is a common and increasing problem affecting millions of people in the US. Persistent Dry Mouth may be an indication of a more serious medical condition. If the feeling persists, it should be investigated by a healthcare professional.

Dry Mouth can result in a poor quality of life. People who report having a dry mouth on a regular basis, report various symptoms such as:

- Dryness or stickiness in the mouth
- Soreness of the mouth or tongue
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty speaking
- Sore cracked lips
- Bad breath
- Problems tasting food

Why is saliva so important?

Saliva serves many roles, some of these roles include:

- **Lubrication:** Without saliva, it would be very difficult to swallow food. Saliva helps to lubricate the mouth and allow food to be swallowed more easily.
- **Oral Hygiene:** The oral cavity is almost constantly washed with saliva, which floats away food debris and helps keep the mouth clean. Saliva also contains antibodies, enzymes, and other factors that fight infection. Flow of saliva diminishes considerably during sleep. The body produces saliva 24 hours a day. Depending on the time of day or the various stimuli that the body is being subjected to, saliva production will vary. In an average day, normally the mouth will produce about 2 to 4 pints of saliva.

People may not be aware of the potential oral health consequences of Dry Mouth. If Dry Mouth symptoms are ignored, over time serious oral health problems such as gum disease, tooth decay or infection can occur.

The first symptoms may be a feeling of dryness or stickiness in your mouth while eating or sleeping. Over time, you may experience a sore or burning mouth; difficulty speaking, swallowing, chewing and/or problems tasting food. There are several causes of Dry Mouth. These include:

- Smoking
- Consuming beverages containing alcohol or caffeine
- Use of some OTC or prescription medications and certain health conditions or therapies

Some examples of medications are:

- Certain over-the-counter antihistamines, decongestants and pain relievers
- Prescription antihistamines, blood pressure medications, antidepressants, sedatives, pain killers, muscle relaxants, and diuretics

Some examples of health conditions and therapies include:

- Hypertension, Diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Sjogren's syndrome, Alzheimer's disease, and stroke
- Chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and damage to the salivary glands.

If you suffer from Sjogren's syndrome or have Dry Mouth resulting from radiotherapy or chemotherapy you should consult your healthcare professional before using any type of Dry Mouth relief product. Never discontinue a prescription medication without consulting your physician.

How can I manage my Dry Mouth symptoms?

There are a number of ways that people manage their dry mouth. Some products can make a dry mouth worse, such as mouthwash that contains alcohol. Some other products commonly used may be too acidic for long-term use.

Here are some ways to manage Dry Mouth:

- Take frequent, small sips of water
- Suck on sugar-free, non-acidic hard candy. Candy containing sugar may increase your risk of tooth decay
- Be sure to see your dental professional regularly and maintain excellent oral hygiene
- Avoid drafts from fans, air conditioning units, and radiators
- Use a humidifier at night
- Avoid alcoholic and caffeinated beverages, as they may increase oral dryness
- Our office can also prescribe various products that can coat and moisturize your mouth.

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