

Managing Dry Mouth

Dry mouth is a common side effect of cancer treatment. The medical term that your doctor may use is “xerostomia” (pronounced zero-sto-mi-a). Dry mouth happens when there is not enough saliva in the mouth. Saliva helps you chew, taste and swallow food. It is also needed to talk.

Symptoms

- Being thirsty more than usual
- Burning sensation
- Small tears or cuts in the lining of the mouth
- Having problems when wearing dentures

Causes

- Medicines used in cancer care
 - Chemotherapy
 - Pain medicines
 - Antidepressants
 - Diuretics (water pills)
 - Anti-nausea or anti-diarrheal medicines
- Surgery involving the salivary glands
- Radiation that directly affects the salivary glands that produce saliva
- Not taking in enough fluids
- Oral infections

Tips for Managing Dry Mouth

Foods

- Choose soft, moist foods that are easy to swallow such as oatmeal, mashed potatoes and noodle casseroles. If there are sores in your mouth, avoid rough-textured, acidic and spicy foods that may cause irritation.
- Choose canned or fresh fruits with a lot of moisture in them, such as pears, grapes, peaches and watermelon. If you have mouth sores avoid fruits and juices high in acid. These include oranges, grapefruit, pineapple, lemon and lime.
- Add gravies or sauces to your food. Adding soups, broth, pureed fruits, sour cream and butter helps to moisten foods. Try dipping dry baked foods (bread, cookies, crackers) in

decaffeinated coffee, tea, milk or other drinks.

- Liquids such as milk or broth can be added to food and pureed or liquefied in a blender or food processor. If spoons or forks cause pain, try drinking pureed foods from a cup.
- Popsicles and smoothies will help keep the mouth moist.
- Sucking on hard candies, like lemon drops, or chewing gum may help keep your mouth moist.

Fluids

- Drink at least 8 - 12 cups (1 cup = 8 ounces) of fluids per day. Carry a bottle of fluids with you and sip frequently throughout the day. Adding a few drops of glycerin to the fluid or water may help keep your mouth moist.
- Limit the amount of coffee with caffeine, tea and soda that you drink. Caffeine can contribute to dry mouth.
- Avoid Alcoholic beverages and mouthwashes that contain alcohol.

Maintain Oral Hygiene

- Rinse your mouth frequently with water (or with ½ teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of water) to help keep it clean. An alcohol-free mouth wash may also be helpful.
- Brush your teeth gently with a soft bristle toothbrush or oral sponge.
- It is important to visit your dentist before, during and after cancer treatment. Your risk of dental decay increases when you have less saliva in your mouth.
- Ask your doctor to recommend an artificial saliva replacement or drugs to stimulate saliva if needed.

If you have any questions about your diet, talk with your registered dietitian at the Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center.

References

The Clinical Guide to Oncology Nutrition, 2nd Edition

Oncology Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group; Laura Elliott, MPH, RD, Laura L. Molseed, MS, RD, and Paula Davis McCallum, MS, RD, with Barbara Grant, MS, RD.

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