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DOES YOUR MOUTH FEEL DRY? TALK TO YOUR GP AND DENTIST

Dry mouth is a common problem and if left untreated can lead to tooth loss, tooth decay and infections in the mouth. Medicines commonly cause dry mouth. But in some cases dry mouth can be caused by diet and lifestyle, medical treatment, getting older or an underlying disease.

If you have dry mouth, talking to your GP and seeing your dentist for a check-up can help you to find out what might be causing your dry mouth and how to improve the symptoms.

This brochure explains how a dry mouth can affect your teeth and mouth, which medicines are more likely to cause dry mouth and what to talk to your GP,

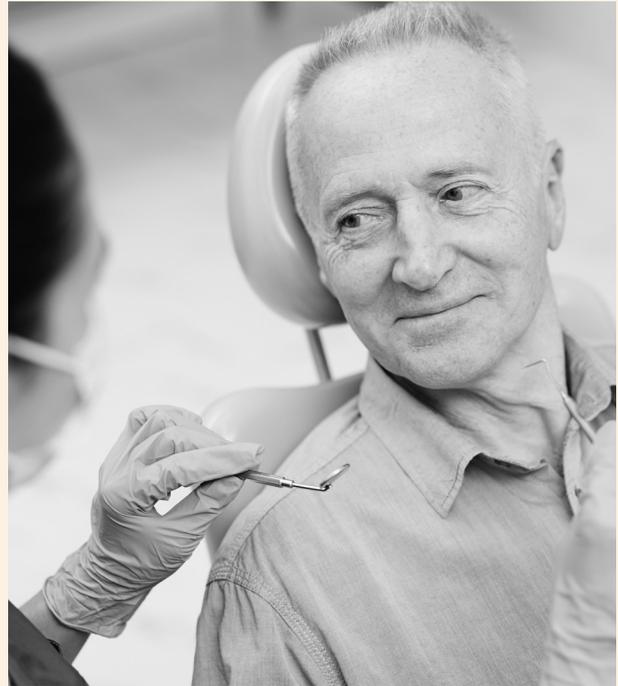
pharmacist and dentist about. It also gives some practical tips to help improve the symptoms of dry mouth.

Do you have any signs and symptoms of dry mouth?

-  Does your mouth feel dry when eating a meal?
-  Do you have any difficulty speaking due to a dry mouth?
-  Do you sip liquids to help swallow dry foods?
-  Do you chew on gum or suck lollies to relieve dry mouth?
-  Does the amount of saliva in your mouth feel too little e.g. thick or stringy?

Have you had your annual dental check-up?

- Good oral health is important for your overall health. Your annual visit to the dentist is your best defence against poor oral health.
- Even if you have dentures, it is important to have an annual dental check-up.
- DVA funds dental services for all Gold Card holders (and for White Card holders for an accepted war or service caused injury or disease). For further information go to: www.dva.gov.au/factsheet-hsv17-dental-services
- To find a dentist in your local area, see the *Australian Dental Association* at: www.ada.org.au/Find-a-Dentist
- When making an appointment, ask your dentist whether they provide services under DVA arrangements. In most cases you won't have any out-of-pocket expenses for dental services.



- Note on your calendar when your next appointment is due.
- If you feel anxious about going to the dentist, talk with your GP and dentist about this. Your dentist is trained to help you feel at ease and comfortable with any treatment that might be required.

? What are the effects of dry mouth?

Dry mouth occurs when you feel as though you don't have enough saliva in your mouth. The discomfort of having a dry mouth can range from mild to severe. If left untreated, it can make it difficult to speak, chew and swallow. It can change the taste of food, and can cause a sore throat, a hoarse voice and bad breath. It can also make your gums sore and dentures painful to wear.

Saliva is important because it:

- prevents tooth loss
- helps you to speak, chew, swallow and digest food
- protects your teeth and gums from bacteria and acids that can lead to dental cavities
- helps prevent infection by balancing the number of bacteria in your mouth.

? What should I talk to my GP about?

If you have dry mouth, it is important to talk to your GP so they can look at what could be causing it. Many medicines can cause dry mouth, including those prescribed by your GP or bought from a pharmacy, supermarket or health food store. They include: antidepressants, antihistamines, some blood pressure tablets, some eye drops, cough and cold medicines, medicines for pain, medicines for urinary problems, and some inhaled medicines.

Your GP might be able to adjust the dose of one of your medicines to help reduce the symptoms of dry mouth.

They might also suggest that you have a Home Medicines Review. In this free service, a specially trained pharmacist comes to your home and reviews your medicines. Together with your GP and pharmacist, you can work out how to best manage your medicines and whether any of your medicines need a change.

Always talk to your GP before stopping, starting or changing any of your medicines.

? What should I talk to my dentist about?

Dry mouth increases your chance of getting dental cavities and other oral health issues. Annual visits to the dentist can ensure that your teeth, dentures (if you have them), gums and mouth stay healthy. Your dentist can also give you advice about how to help manage dry mouth and which products are best to use.

When you see the dentist, tell them that you feel as though you have a dry mouth and about all the medicines you take. This includes those prescribed by your GP or bought from a pharmacy, supermarket or health food store. Although it's not essential, a letter from your GP would be helpful, as it provides a medical history and list of medicines.



? What else can I do?

Simple measures can help to relieve the feeling of dry mouth and minimise the consequences. For specific advice, talk to your GP, pharmacist and dentist.

Here are some tips that might help you:



Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, use dental floss daily, and rinse your mouth with a non-alcoholic mouthwash. Talk to your dentist about which products are best to use.



Minimise sugary and acidic foods and drinks such as fruit juices, cordial, soft drinks, alcohol, sports and energy drinks.



Sip on plain tap water, suck on ice chips or spray water into your mouth. Some people find using a humidifier at night while sleeping helpful. Check with your GP about how much water you need to drink each day – this will vary depending on the time of year, how active you are, and the medicines that you take.



Use a water-based lip moisturiser if your lips are dry.



If you smoke, talk to your GP or pharmacist about the options for quitting. For support to quit and a personalised quitting plan contact the national smoking *Quitline* on 13 7848 or at: www.quitnow.gov.au



Eat foods that require chewing to stimulate saliva production, especially at breakfast, and chew sugar-free gum or sugar-free lollies between meals.



Ask your pharmacist or dentist about products for dry mouth. Specialised toothpaste, mouthwash or antibacterial gel for dry mouth might help.



Ask your pharmacist or GP to check your inhaler technique. Use a spacer device and rinse your mouth with water immediately after each use.



See the DVA *Vetaffairs* article 'Prevent dry mouth from ruining your teeth' available at: www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/about%20dva/vetaffairs/2017/vol33No3.pdf



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