

Autoimmune Resource & Research

Centre
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Oral Care for Dry Mouth Patients

A dry mouth is not a happy mouth. Lack Of saliva may cause mouth discomfort, make eating, swallowing and talking difficult and produce a bad taste. Artificial saliva may help to relieve some of these problems and is available from pharmacies. Correct care of your natural teeth or dentures is also a must.

If you have your own teeth

Saliva is extremely important for washing bacteria (germs) and food debris away from your teeth and gum margins and also for providing the minerals necessary to keep the surfaces of your teeth hard. A dry mouth often leads to tooth decay and gum problems (periodontal disease). To avoid these problems, the following are important:

- Diet:** Avoid chewing sweets or lollies. Although these may make the mouth feel fresh, the high sugar content allows mouth bacteria to produce acid which causes tooth decay. Sucking a cheery seed will often help produce saliva and does not harm the teeth. Some sugarless types of chewing gum are available.
- Fluoride:** The use of a flavoured fluoride rinse or a flavoured fluoride gel is a must. The fluoride gel can be applied to the teeth using a sportstyle mouthguard which must be custom-made by a dentist. Using the rinse or gel once or twice a week will prevent decay, harden your teeth and reduce gum problems.
- Cleaning:** Using a toothbrush with a small head and soft bristles brush your teeth and gum margins with a fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day. Change your brush at least once a month. It is most important that you clean between your teeth with dental tape/floss or fine dental tooth picks to remove the germs and food debris that your brush cannot remove.
- Mouthwashes:** Antiseptic mouthwashes may help to reduce the number of germs in your mouth. Your dentist can advise you regarding these. A simple formula which often soothes the mouth is a dessert spoon of bicarbonate of soda in a cup of warm water. This often relieves the 'acid' taste of a dry mouth and can be used as necessary.
- Dental Care:** If you have a dry mouth, then you require dental check-ups at least three times a year so that your dentist can monitor the health of your teeth and gums closely. Preventative care such as checking your level of home oral hygiene, scaling and polishing your teeth and treating any dental decay early can be provided.

If you have Dentures

Saliva provides a 'cushion' between your dentures and your gums and also helps in the suction of an upper full denture. It also helps to kill germs which grow on your dentures. A dry mouth may allow dentures to traumatise your gums to produce sore spots. Suction may also be reduced. To avoid these problems, the following are important:

- Cleaning:** Don't just brush your dentures with toothpaste. Use a non-perfumed soap as this will help to clean away germs. If there is any calcium (tartar) on your dentures, this should be cleaned off professionally.

Wearing: Never wear your dentures at night as this increases the amount of gum trauma, promotes infection beneath the dentures and reduces their good fitting. To improve suction during the day, a smear of glycerine on the gum-fitting surfaces of your dentures may help.

Dental Care: If you are having problems, see your dentist,

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