

XEROSTOMIA

Xerostomia is a subjective feeling of dryness in the mouth, usually caused by an abnormality of the salivary glands. The salivary glands excrete an antimicrobial, clear solution (saliva) that has both digestive enzymes and lubricating properties. Saliva cleans the mouth, starts food digestion, and maintains the pH in the mouth.

There are many potential causes of xerostomia. True xerostomia can be caused by medication, disease processes and many lifestyle factors. Some of these are listed below.

Radiation therapy to the head and neck area (especially with chemotherapy) will cause xerostomia in up to 60% of patients. This may affect speaking, chewing, and swallowing. You may also have pain, burning, dry/cracked lips, bad breath, and difficulty swallowing. It can cause infections in the mouth due to the decrease in saliva production. It can also cause decreased food/liquid intake, cavities, and a general decrease in your quality of life.

Drug-related causes:

- Chemotherapy
- Diuretics (Lasix)
- Antihistamines (Benadryl)
- Blood pressure and heart medications
- Some pain medications
- Anti-anxiety medications

Disease related causes include:

- Sarcoidosis
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Autoimmune thyroid disease
- HIV
- Hepatitis C

Lifestyle causes:

- Smoking/tobacco use
- Alcohol consumption
- Caffeine consumption
- Dehydration
- Snoring or mouth breathing

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You can help manage this side effect with the following strategies:

- Frequent sips of water
- Adding liquids like gravy or milk to foods to help moisten them
- Avoid hard foods such as chips
- Avoid foods that are spicy or acidic
- Use ice chips or popsicles to suck on to keep the mouth moist (unless you are getting Oxaliplatin as part of your chemotherapy)
- Maintain good oral hygiene, using a soft toothbrush and scheduling visits to the dentist for cleaning and fluoride treatment. Make sure your dentist knows that you are on chemotherapy.
- Use a mouth rinse consisting of 1 tsp baking soda, 1 tsp salt and 1 liter of water to help neutralize pH and decrease dryness. Make a new solution daily
- Limit or eliminate caffeine and alcohol intake
- Stop smoking

Please talk with your healthcare team so we can help you with your symptoms. Call your physician or nurse immediately if you develop a fever or are unable to eat/drink.