

Dry Mouth

Overview

Reduced saliva flow that results in a dry mouth is a common problem among older adults. It is caused by certain medical disorders and is often a side effect of medications such as antihistamines, decongestants, pain killers and diuretics.

Some of the common problems associated with dry mouth include a constant sore throat, burning sensation, problems speaking, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness or dry nasal passages. Left untreated, dry mouth can damage your teeth. Without adequate saliva to lubricate your mouth, wash away food, and neutralize the acids produced by plaque, extensive decay can occur.

Your dentist can recommend various methods to restore moisture. Sugar-free candy or gum stimulates saliva flow, and moisture can be replaced by using artificial saliva and oral rinses.

Dry mouth is a potential side effect of numerous medications (prescribed and over-the-counter). Among them are antihistamines, decongestants, painkillers, high blood pressure medications, muscle relaxants, drugs for urinary incontinence, Parkinson's disease medications, antidepressants and many others. Drying irritates the soft tissues in the mouth, which can make them inflamed and more susceptible to infection.

Without the cleansing effects of saliva, tooth decay and other oral health problems become more common. Patients using oral inhalers for asthma often develop oral candidiasis, an oral fungal infection, and are encouraged to rinse their mouths with water after using the inhaler.