

Eggert Family Dentistry

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Dry Mouth

Dry mouth can be linked to a medical condition called xerostomia. It is related to how well the salivary glands function to keep the mouth moist. When the mouth is moist it can function properly and tooth decay and other infections can be prevented.

Saliva is vital to everyday processes such as tasting, swallowing, speaking, and digesting. Saliva is a natural defense for teeth. Without saliva, teeth are vulnerable to tooth decay and bacterial, fungal, and viral infections. Human saliva is composed mostly of water, but it also includes electrolytes, mucus, antibacterial compounds, and various enzymes. The components of saliva play a major role in keeping your mouth healthy by rinsing away food particles, neutralizing harmful acids, and providing enzymes to help digest food.

Xerostomia is often caused by both prescription and over-the-counter medications. There are over 400 medications that can contribute to mouth dryness, including antihypertensives (blood pressure medications), antidepressants, painkillers, tranquilizers, diuretics, and antihistamines.

Xerostomia can also be caused by radiation therapy and chemotherapy, hormonal alterations, or diseases like diabetes, lupus, Alzheimer's disease, and kidney disease. Other contributing factors include stress, anxiety, depression, nutritional deficiencies, and dysfunction of the immune system, as is seen in individuals with HIV/AIDS.

The signs and symptoms of dry mouth can include the increased need to sip or drink fluids when swallowing, difficulty speaking, difficulty swallowing, a burning sensation or soreness in the mouth, inability to eat certain foods, diminished or altered sense of taste, increased susceptibility to oral infections, sleep interruptions due to thirst, difficulty wearing dentures, tooth decay, gingivitis, and stale or bad breath.

If you suspect you have symptoms of dry mouth, talk with us, your dental team. There are products we can recommend like saliva substitutes, over-the-counter mouthwashes, gels, and sprays. It is also important to keep impeccable oral hygiene habits including brushing twice each day, and flossing daily. Chewing sugarless gum and drinking plenty of water can sometimes ease discomfort. Finally, avoiding alcohol, caffeine, smoking, citrus juices, dry foods, and overly salty foods can reduce the feeling of dry mouth.