

Symptoms of Dry Mouth

Saliva is the fluid produced by your salivary glands located at the back of your mouth. It's important for keeping your mouth and teeth healthy. Saliva helps you:

- Clean your mouth
- Keep your mouth moist
- Chew
- Break down food particles
- Digest food

When there's not enough saliva in your mouth, it can lead to dry mouth. This causes signs and symptoms such as:

- Dryness or a sticky feeling in your mouth
- Thick and stringy spit
- Bad breath (halitosis)
- Difficulty chewing, speaking, and swallowing
- Dry, hoarse, or sore throat
- Dry or grooved tongue
- A change in your sense of taste
- Problems wearing dentures

Severe symptoms may include:

- Tooth decay
- Dry eyes and skin
- Skin rash
- Joint pain

What Causes Dry Mouth?

Dry mouth is common. It affects nearly 22% of the world's population. Older adults tend to deal with it more often. But several things can cause you to wake up with it. Dry mouth can be a signal of a health problem or a side effect of certain medications.

Reasons you might have it include:

Sleep Apnea. This is a sleep disorder that affects your ability to breathe the right way when you're asleep. When you don't breathe well during sleep, it's much harder to get deep, restful sleep. You may breathe from your mouth or snore loudly. Both can lead to waking up with a dry mouth. The most common type of sleep apnea is obstructive sleep apnea. If you have it, your throat muscles relax while you sleep. Your doctor may prescribe continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy as treatment. The CPAP machine has a hose and a face mask or nose piece through which you get continuous air pressure to help you breathe better. But dry mouth is one of the common side effects of using the machine. Especially if you breathe through your mouth or sleep with it open. One study of 688 people with sleep apnea who use a CPAP machine for treatment, found that 45% of the participants woke up with a dry mouth. If you have moderate to severe sleep apnea you're more likely to wake up with a dry mouth. Being overweight also puts you at higher risk for developing dry mouth while using a CPAP machine.

Another study found that if the air pressure created in your mouth while using the CPAP machine is more than what the machine creates, it could affect your saliva flow and production. This can lead to dry mouth in the mornings.

If you're waking up with a dry mouth regularly or you snore loudly, it may be a sign that you have sleep apnea. Talk to your doctor about it. If you think the CPAP machine is causing you to wake up with dry mouth, your doctor may be able to offer alternative treatment options.

Aging. Research shows that about 1 in 5 older adults wake up with dry mouth. Other factors can include prescription drugs, lack of a good nutritional diet, and other age-related health problems.

Medication side effects. Dry mouth is listed as a side effect for several medications, including ones available over the counter. Drugs that are more likely to cause dry mouth include medications for:

- Depression
- High blood pressure
- Pain
- Anxiety
- Antihistamines, muscle relaxants, and decongestants can also cause you to wake up with dry mouth.

Cancer treatment. Chemotherapy drugs can reduce your saliva production and quality and lead to dry mouth. This may be temporary, and your saliva production may return to normal once you're done with the treatment. If you get radiation treatments to your head and neck, it could damage your salivary glands and reduce the amount of saliva your mouth has. This may be temporary or permanent depending on the area and therapy dose.

Nerve damage. Injury or surgery in your head or neck area can sometimes cause nerve damage. This may affect how well you're able to make saliva.

Other health conditions. Certain health problems can also cause dry mouth. Examples include:

- Diabetes
- Stroke
- Yeast infection (thrush) in your mouth
- Alzheimer's disease
- Autoimmune diseases such as Sjogren's syndrome (dry eyes and mouth) or HIV/AIDS
- Snoring
- Mouth breathing

Lifestyle. Certain habits such as smoking or chewing tobacco and drinking alcohol may increase dry mouth symptoms. Using recreational drugs like marijuana may cause dry mouth temporarily until the effect of the drug wears off. Methamphetamine can dry your mouth as well as damage your teeth and cause a condition called "meth mouth."

Dehydration is a condition that happens when you don't drink enough water, sweat too much, or get sick. It's common for your mouth to also be dry.

What Can You Do to Ease Dry Mouth?

Besides feeling uncomfortable, long-term dry mouth can also cause tooth decay or other oral diseases. If you're waking up with dry mouth, it's important to find out what's causing it to figure out the right treatment.

To ease dry mouth symptoms you can:

- Check with your doctor to see if any of your medications might be causing the symptoms. If so, they may be able to switch you to a different drug. Don't stop prescription drugs before talking to a doctor first.
- Take your medicines in the morning instead of taking them before bed. This can reduce dry mouth symptoms when you wake up.
- Sip water before you take medications. It makes your mouth moist and easier to swallow pills.
- Avoid over-the-counter pain and allergy medications if possible.

You can also try these at-home changes to ease symptoms:

- Brush your teeth twice every day and use mouthwash. This will help you keep up with oral hygiene and avoid tooth decay or bad breath.
- Suck on ice cubes or popsicles to increase saliva in your mouth.
- Try sugarless gums or candies that contain xylitol -- this activates your salivary glands.
- Drink lots of water or sip some throughout the day.
- If you breathe with your mouth open at night, use a humidifier.
- Avoid spicy or salty foods and sugary drinks.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol.
- Cut down on smoking.

When to See a Doctor

If at-home fixes don't ease your symptoms, it's best to talk to your doctor about it. If you have risk factors for HIV, get tested as soon as possible. If you have severe symptoms like tooth decay or cavities, see a dentist. Depending on the cause, your doctor will come up with a treatment plan that works best for you.

Your doctor may prescribe one of the FDA-approved medications to boost saliva flow or treat the dryness. These include:

- **Cevimeline (Evoxac)**. This drug works to treat dry mouth in people with Sjogren's syndrome. Your doctor may prescribe cevimeline at a dose of 30 mg 3 times a day for at least 3 months.
- **Pilocarpine (Salagen)** to boost saliva production. Pilocarpine is typically administered at a dose of 5 mg three times a day for at least 3 months.

If you notice any reaction or side effects, tell your doctor.