

What Vitamin Deficiency Causes Dry Lips? A Dietitian Explains

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It may be due to a lack of certain nutrients or something else.

When you have dry lips, your lips may feel and appear dry, chapped, inflamed, or even cracked or bleeding.

Dry lips can happen for any number of reasons, including the following:

- Dehydration
- Dry or cold weather
- Excess sun exposure
- Allergies
- Certain medications
- Vitamin deficiency

A deficiency in specific nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, and water, may lead to dry lips. For example, a lack of the micronutrients zinc, iron, or B vitamins may cause your lips to become dry. Various factors may cause a person to become deficient in a nutrient.

Vitamins and minerals are found in a wide variety of foods. Typically, a well-balanced diet will provide all the micronutrients your body needs. However, specific diets, health conditions, and life stages may sometimes make nourishing your body correctly more challenging.

Examples of ways a person can develop nutrient deficiencies include:

- Low food intake (due to an eating disorder or food scarcity)
- Poor variety of foods consumed
- Impaired digestion and absorption of nutrients from foods
- Food allergies or intolerances
- Chronic gastrointestinal diseases, including celiac disease and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- Pregnancy

This article will dive deeper into nutrient deficiencies that cause dry lips, other causes of dry lips, treatments for dry lips, and when to see a healthcare provider.

Nutrient Deficiencies That Cause Dry Lips

Although you can't always tell if you have a nutrient deficiency by looking in the mirror, a lack of certain vitamins or minerals may show physical signs, like dry lips.

One of the signs of a **deficiency in B vitamins, zinc, or iron** is dry, chapped lips. Dehydration can also cause your lips to look and feel dry.

B Vitamins

The B vitamins are a group of water-soluble vitamins essential to various processes in the human body. You may notice dry lips and similar symptoms if you're deficient in some B vitamins.

Without enough niacin (vitamin B3) or biotin (vitamin B7), your lips may become swollen or scaly.

Insufficient pyridoxine (vitamin B6) intake or absorption can cause cheilosis, marked by scaled lips and cracked corners of the mouth.

Additionally, although rare in the U.S., riboflavin (vitamin B2) deficiency may lead to swollen, cracked lips.

Zinc

Zinc is a trace mineral, which means your body only needs it in small amounts. Despite this, zinc plays a crucial role in hundreds of enzymatic reactions and is an integral part of skin health, digestion, immunity, and development.

Because zinc is needed throughout the body, a deficiency in this mineral may affect the bones, digestive tract, reproductive tract, nervous system, immune system, and skin.

Chapped lips may be an overlooked symptom of zinc deficiency. However, in some cases, zinc deficiency is associated with lip inflammation, which can also cause dryness.

Iron

Iron is necessary to make hemoglobin and myoglobin, two proteins that transport oxygen throughout the body. Iron has many other vital roles, so a deficiency in this mineral may be detrimental.

Lip inflammation and angular cheilitis (cracked mouth corners) have been linked to iron deficiencies. Evidence shows that lip peeling may also indicate an iron deficiency.

Water

Although not a vitamin or mineral, water is considered an essential nutrient.

Water hydrates your body, including your skin. Your lips may become dry, chapped, or cracked without enough of it.

Indeed, dry lips are a common and early symptom of dehydration. Dry lips may be accompanied by thirst, dry mouth, headache, decreased urination, lightheadedness, or other symptoms of dehydration.

Other Causes of Dry Lips

Dry lips can have causes that aren't related to nutrient deficiencies.

Some people get dry, chapped lips from health conditions or environmental factors. Dry lips may also result from allergies or contact with an irritant. Other possible causes of dry lips include:

- Sun exposure
- Infections
- Smoking
- Lip licking or picking
- Certain medications
- Weather

The following sections outline some of the common causes of dry lips.

Medications

Oral and topical medications may cause dry lips. Dry lips may occur due to improper use or simply as a side effect of the medication.

Certain medications may lead to cheilitis or dry, inflamed lips. Medications that have reported instances of cheilitis include:

- Topical antibiotics
- Antiviral drugs
- Local anesthetics
- Medical products, like creams, sunscreen, and lip care, may also cause dry lips for some people.

Too Much Vitamin A

Vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin and natural antioxidant that you need daily. Unlike other vitamins and nutrients, too much vitamin A from foods, supplements, or medications may leave you with dry lips.

Consuming too much vitamin A, also known as hypervitaminosis A, may lead to a long list of symptoms, including dry, cracked corners of the mouth.

Other forms of vitamin A, like retinol and retinoids, may also cause dry lips.

Oral or topical retinoids are a standard treatment for acne vulgaris. However, some evidence suggests that retinoid medications may irritate the lips, leaving them chapped.

Nighttime Breathing Devices

Some people require a nighttime breathing device, such as a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, to sleep. This may be due to sleep apnea or other medical conditions that make breathing challenging at night.

Because of their design and how they work, CPAP machines and other nighttime breathing devices may cause dry lips (and mouth). Readjusting your sleep mask or using a humidifier while you sleep may decrease the risk of dry mouth and lips.

Dry Climate

Certain climates and weather conditions may increase your risk of dry, chapped lips.

Unsurprisingly, dry climates are known to cause dry lips if proper care isn't taken. Cold, windy, or excessively hot climates may also lead to drier-than-usual lips.

Dry climates in particular can quickly dry out your skin and lips. When living in or visiting a dry climate, hydration is vital to keeping your skin and lips naturally moisturized.

Treatments for Dry Lips

If you have dry lips, you may be wondering how to treat them.

To treat dry, chapped lips:

- Use non-irritating, fragrance-free lip products.
- Apply lip balm (like beeswax or petrolatum) throughout the day.
- Use a lip balm that contains sunscreen if going outside.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Use a humidifier when at home.
- Avoid licking, biting, or picking your lips.

You may also be able to prevent yourself from getting dry lips altogether. Hydration and the regular use of lip balm and sunscreen on your lips may decrease your risk of getting dry lips.

When to See a Healthcare Provider

Everyone will get dry lips from time to time and be able to treat them with some easy at-home remedies.

However, some cases of dry lips may require the special attention of a healthcare provider.

Dry lips that don't improve over time warrant a call to a healthcare provider. You should also call a healthcare provider if you have sores on your lips that won't heal.

Additionally, if you suspect your dry lips are due to something more serious, like a medical condition, it's time to see a healthcare provider.