

Dry Mouth or Thick Saliva

Dry mouth is a common side effect of radiation therapy, some types of chemotherapy, and some medicines. Radiation therapy to the mouth area can decrease the amount of saliva your body produces or make the saliva thick or stringy.

Some people can relieve mild dry mouth by sipping fluids. Others may have more severe dry mouth and experience problems with eating, talking, and sleeping. Dry mouth also raises your risk for dental cavities and mouth infections.

Food and Drink Choices to Manage Dry Mouth and Thick Saliva

- Drink 8 to 10 cups of fluid a day to keep your mouth moist and help loosen thick saliva.
- Limit drinks with caffeine (such as coffee, tea, and colas) and alcoholic beverages because they can cause dry mouth.
- When you are away from home, carry a water bottle with you and sip from it regularly.
- Eat soft, bland foods that are room temperature or cold, such as blenderized fruits and vegetables; well-cooked, tender beef, chicken, or fish; and thin, moist cereals.
- Moisten foods in broth, soup, sauces, gravy, butter, or margarine. You can also use these foods as “dips.”

- If you are having trouble eating, talk with your registered dietitian (RD) about whether you should use liquid meal replacements.
- To increase saliva, try tart foods and drinks, such as lemonade or cranberry juice. Very sweet foods and drinks may also help. Avoid acidic foods and drinks if you have a sore or tender mouth.
- Enjoy soothing frozen fruits, such as frozen whole grapes, banana pieces, melon balls, peach slices, or mandarin orange slices.
- Suck on frozen fruit pops (such as Popsicles), fruit ices, sorbets, ice chips, or other cold foods.
- Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugar-free candy to stimulate saliva. Citrus-flavored candies, such as lemon drops, often work best.

Quick Tip

Use a cool-mist humidifier to moisten air, especially at night. Keep the humidifier clean to avoid spreading bacteria or mold in the air.

Oral Care Tips

- Brush your teeth with toothpaste and a soft-bristle toothbrush after each meal and snack. If your gums are inflamed, use an antibacterial toothpaste (like Biotene).
- Rinse your mouth before and after meals with plain water or a mild, homemade mouth rinse (1 quart water mixed with $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon baking soda).
- Alcohol can make dryness worse, so choose alcohol-free mouthwashes, such as Biotene. (Labels will indicate whether products contain alcohol.)
- Swish and spit with club soda or lemon-lime soda to help loosen and remove dry or thick saliva.

- Floss your teeth every day to lower your risk for cavities.
- Talk to your doctor about using oral moisturizers, saliva substitutes, and saliva-stimulating medications.
- Chew antibacterial chewing gum to help reduce gum inflammation and stimulate the production of saliva.
- Avoid smoking and chewing tobacco as they can cause dry mouth.