MOUTH DRYNESS (XEROSTOMIA)

Mouth dryness is the most common late effect and major cause of decreased quality of life. Saliva is needed for taste, swallowing, and speech. It helps prevent infection by neutralizing acid and cleaning teeth and gums. When mouth dryness is present, tooth decay and gum disease are more likely to develop.

What are the signs and symptoms of mouth dryness?

- Thick, stringy saliva
- Increase thirst
- Change in taste
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty talking
- Sore or burning feeling on the tongue
- Cuts or cracks to the corners of the mouth
- Dry, cracked tongue
- Difficulty wearing dentures

What causes dry mouth?

- Chemotherapy
- Radiation
- Medications
- Stress
- Dehydration
- Infections in the mouth

What medications can cause mouth dryness?

- Antidepressants
- Diuretics (water pills)
- Narcotics (pain pills)
- Nausea medications
How to manage dry mouth

- Drink plenty of water. You may want to carry a water bottle with you all the time.
- Suck on ice chips
- Use saliva substitutes (Biotene & Oral Balance – both can be purchased at the pharmacy without a prescription)
- Mouth rinses in the morning, after meals, and before bed

![Recipe for mouth rinse:]

\[
\frac{1}{2} \text{ tsp salt} \\
\frac{1}{2} \text{ tsp baking soda} \\
1 \text{ cup warm water}
\]

- Medications to stimulate the salivary gland production
- Suck on sugar-free candy
- Chew sugarless gum
- Acupuncture
- Use cool moist humidifier at night

Caring for your Mouth/teeth

- Visit a dentist regularly. Let your physician know if you are going to see your dentist if you are receiving treatment.
- Brush your teeth at least twice a day
- Floss daily with a wax floss (Avoid if platelets are less than 50,000)
- Make sure dentures fit properly
- Clean dentures at least daily

What makes dry mouth worse?

- Smoking or chewing tobacco
- Caffeinated beverages
- Acidic or spicy foods

Resources:

Up to Date “Complications of Radiotherapy for Head and Neck Cancer”
NCCN Guidelines
ASTRO Guidelines

2015 Enterprise Survivorship Team