



# Dry Mouth or Thick Saliva

Your mouth can become dry from radiation therapy, some types of chemotherapy, or some medications. The saliva glands can become irritated and produce less saliva, or your saliva can become very thick, sticky, or stringy. For some people, dryness is mild and can be managed with drinking more water and fluids. For others, dryness is more severe and can cause problems with eating, talking, and sleeping. A dry mouth also increases your chance for developing dental cavities or mouth infections. If you smoke, chew tobacco, or drink alcoholic beverages, the dryness will be worse.

- ◆ Drink 8 to 10 cups of fluids a day, and take a water bottle with you when you leave home. Drinking lots of fluids throughout the day helps loosen sticky secretions.
- ◆ Keep your mouth clean and your lips moist. Use a soft-bristle toothbrush; rinse your mouth before and after meals with plain water or a mild mouth rinse (made with 1 quart water,  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon baking soda); and floss regularly.
- ◆ Choose soft, bland-tasting foods that are at room temperature or cold. Try blenderized fruits and vegetables; beef, chicken, or fish cooked until very tender; and well-thinned cereals.
- ◆ Add broth, soup, sauces, gravy, butter, or margarine to moisten foods. Dip or soak food in whatever you are drinking.
- ◆ Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless candy to stimulate saliva. Citrus-flavored candies such as lemon drops often work best.
- ◆ To thin thick saliva secretions, try very sour or very sweet foods and beverages, such as lemonade or cranberry juice; these foods will cause more saliva to flow. Avoid these foods and beverages if you have a sore or tender mouth.
- ◆ Limit beverages with caffeine, such as coffee, tea, and colas, because caffeine may cause added dryness. Chocolate also contains caffeine.

## Cooling Effects

- ◆ Cold foods and beverages can be soothing. Try freezing fruit such as whole grapes, banana pieces, melon balls, peach slices, or mandarin orange slices. Suck on frozen fruit pops (such as Popsicles), fruit ices, slushes, ice chips, or other cold foods.
- ◆ Use a cool-mist humidifier to moisten room air, especially at night. Be sure to keep the humidifier clean to avoid spreading bacteria or mold in the air.



## Product Hints

You do not need a prescription for items recommended in this section. However, many drugstores keep them behind the pharmacist's counter, instead of on drugstore shelves.

- ◆ Avoid mouthwashes such as Listerine and Scope. They contain alcohol, which can make mouth dryness worse. Try Biotene alcohol-free mouthwash, or you can make your own mouth rinse with 1 teaspoon baking soda and  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt, dissolved in 1 quart of water.
- ◆ Biotene also makes an antibacterial toothpaste that helps reduce gum inflammation, as well as an antibacterial chewing gum that stimulates the production of saliva.
- ◆ Oral moisturizers act to seal in moisture in your mouth. Your pharmacy may carry Mouth Kote, Oral Balance, or Oral Moist.
- ◆ Saliva substitutes are helpful if your salivary glands have been removed by surgery or damaged by radiation. These products add moisture to your mouth. They can be used with oral moisturizers. Your pharmacy may carry Xero-lube, Glandosane, or Salivart saliva substitute.
- ◆ Nutritional supplements, such as liquid meal replacements, may be helpful during this time. Your doctor, nurse, or dietitian may have samples and suggestions about which supplements would be best for you.

## Recipes

### Peach Fizz\*

1 cup peach nectar (or other nonacidic fruit juice)  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup club soda

Mix in a glass with ice for a refreshing drink.

*Makes one serving. Each serving contains 130 calories and less than 1 gram of protein.*

### Fruit Shake\*

2 cups juice (apple, apricot, grape or peach), chilled  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup whole milk  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon vanilla  
Crushed ice made from about 4 cubes  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup vanilla ice cream

Put all ingredients into a 1-quart plastic container with lid. Shake vigorously and serve.

*Makes two servings. Each serving contains 260 calories and 5 grams protein (calculated with apple juice).*

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