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A dentist who belongs to the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) is one of 35,000 dentists dedicated to continuing their dental education to provide the best possible care to their patients.

An AGD dentist:

- Must complete 75 hours of continuing dental education every three years.
- Is educated and trained in all areas related to the diagnosis, treatment and management of a patient's oral health.
- Is up-to-date on the latest procedures and technologies.
- Is dedicated to educating and enabling you to make the most informed dental health choices.

To find an AGD member dentist, call **1.877.2X.A.YEAR** (1.877.292.9327) or go online at www.agd.org/findadentist/

For dental health information and free advice, visit the SmileLine at <http://forums.agd.org/agdsmileline> where you can post questions to be answered by an AGD member.

Experience the AGD difference



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A patient's guide to better oral health

How your general dentist can help relieve
the oral side effects of medications.



DRY MOUTH: A CONDITION SHARED BY MILLIONS

Today, one of the most common oral health problems is dry mouth, also known as xerostomia (zero-stoh-me-uh).

Dry mouth is actually a symptom that can be caused by many different things. However, the most common cause is medication including prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

Dry mouth is not necessarily a sign of a serious problem. However, it can lead to serious oral problems including tooth decay, soft tissue inflammation, pain and infection.

If you experience dry mouth on a regular basis, you should consult your general dentist.

The importance of a healthy mouth

Your mouth is a fragile environment that has certain requirements to stay healthy.

One of those requirements is saliva. Saliva helps digest food and makes it possible for you to chew and swallow easily. It continually washes away food debris and keeps your mouth clean. With enzymes that destroy bacteria, saliva is one of your body's main defenses against disease-causing organisms. More than 500 species of bacteria thrive in your mouth at any given time.

These bacteria constantly form dental plaque — a sticky, colorless film that clings to your teeth and can cause problems like tooth decay. Minerals in saliva help repair tooth enamel weakened by bacteria.

Medications that reduce saliva flow can disrupt the normal balance of bacteria in your mouth and compromise your mouth's defenses.

A side-effect of more than 400 medications

Many prescriptions and over-the-counter medications can reduce your saliva production and cause dry mouth. While this is the most common cause, dry mouth may also be a symptom of some diseases and other conditions.

Causes of dry mouth

Medications

- Antidepressants
- Antihistamines
- Decongestants
- Diuretics
- High blood pressure medicine
- Muscle relaxants
- Pain killers
- Sedatives

Diseases

- Parkinson's
- Alzheimer's
- Stroke
- AIDS
- Diabetes
- Sjogren's Syndrome

Other

- Radiation treatments
- Stress
- Anxiety



TELL-TALE SIGNS

Dry mouth is a condition that is easy to identify. If you have regular, frequent symptoms like those described below, contact your general dentist:

Difficulty chewing or swallowing

Reduced saliva that is thick and sticky

A burning feeling in your mouth

A dry tongue

Strange tastes

Bad breath

Some Serious Problems

Chronic dry mouth can result in oral health difficulties that include:

Tooth decay

Gum disease

Mouth infections

OTHER EFFECTS OF MEDICATIONS ON YOUR ORAL HEALTH

Dry mouth is not the only condition that may come with taking medications. Others include:

Abnormal bleeding

Aspirin and anticoagulants used to prevent heart disease or stroke can reduce the ability of your blood to clot. This can affect your gums during oral surgery and other procedures.

Discolored teeth

Tetracycline products may permanently stain the teeth of young children during their early development. Pregnant women may also want to avoid such products during the last half of their pregnancy.

Enlarged gum tissues

Some medications such as anti-seizure drugs, immunosuppressive agents and calcium channel blockers can cause overgrown gum tissue.

Soft tissue problems

Oral contraceptives, blood pressure medication and chemotherapy may cause oral sores or inflammation of soft tissues.

Changes in taste

Some medications can affect your taste or leave a bitter or metallic taste. They include respiratory inhalants, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, nicotine skin patches and some cardiovascular medicines.

Other medications not listed here may affect your oral health. Be sure to tell your general dentist about ALL medications and treatments that you are currently taking. And don't forget about vitamins and herbal supplements.



WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW FOR RELIEF

You can get relief from dry mouth — and avoid more serious problems — by following these simple steps:

Drink more water and sugar-free beverages.

Use sugar-free chewing gum to stimulate saliva production.

Practice good oral hygiene. Careful tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste and regular flossing to reduce dental plaque can help prevent gum disease.

See a dentist who is a member of the AGD. Professional oral care helps to maintain the overall health of your teeth and mouth, and provides for early detection of problems.

Don't use tobacco. Besides drying the mouth, tobacco results in smokers having seven times the risk of developing gum disease compared to non-smokers.

Limit alcohol. Dry mouth can be caused by excessive use of alcohol. Alcohol consumption is a risk factor for oral and throat cancers. Alcohol and tobacco used together are the primary risk factors for these cancers.

Avoid drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea and some sodas. Caffeine can dry out the mouth.

Get dental care before undergoing cancer chemotherapy or radiation to the head or neck.

Be aware of sudden changes in taste and smell.

Use a humidifier at night.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU SEE YOUR GENERAL DENTIST

If you have concerns about dry mouth or other oral conditions, be prepared to provide your dentist with information that will help in diagnosis and treatment. Ask yourself:

- Do you need to moisten your mouth often?
- Do you need to drink liquids often for your mouth to feel normal?
- Does your mouth feel dry at mealtime?
- Do you feel like you have less saliva than you used to?
- Do you have trouble swallowing?
- Is it hard to eat dry foods such as crackers or toast?
- Do you have any chronic illness, such as diabetes or hypertension?
- What prescription drugs are you taking?
- What over-the-counter or dietary supplements are you taking?
- How often do you brush your teeth?
- Do you wear dentures? If so, how often do you clean your dentures?
- Do you have toothaches or other dental pain?
- Do you ever have sores in your mouth or on your lips?
- How much water do you drink throughout the day?

