

## Dry Mouth and Thick Saliva

Saliva naturally moistens the mouth. Dry mouth is defined as not having enough saliva and moisture in your mouth.

Dry mouth (also known as xerostomia, cotton mouth or Sjögren syndrome), is a common side effect of chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Dry mouth is also caused by various medicines including antidepressants, anti-anxiety, and allergy medicines.

### Saliva has many important jobs in our mouths including:

- Moistening and coating foods so they may be swallowed more easily.
- Washing away pieces of food and plaque from teeth.
- Limiting the growth of bacteria that cause tooth decay and other mouth infections.
- Providing minerals to prevent cavities.
- Providing enzymes that aid in digestion.
- Moistening the skin tissue inside the mouth to make it easier to chew and speak.

### Symptoms of dry mouth include:

- Chapped or cracked lips
- Dry tongue
- Dry throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Mouth sores
- Tooth decay
- Increased gum sensitivity
- Bad breath

### Things to do to prevent dry mouth and thick saliva:

- Drink at least 8 cups of water a day (i.e., four 16 ounce water bottles).
- Eat soft, moist foods that are cool or at room temperature. Examples include applesauce, pudding, soft fruit and vegetables and soft-cooked chicken and fish.
- Moistens foods with milk, broth, soup, sauces, gravy, creams, butter, or margarine.
- Suck on sugar-free sour lemon drops, sugarless gum, frozen fruit, sugarless candy, or popsicles
- Drink 100% pure papaya juice. Papaya contains an enzyme that helps to thin saliva.
- Keep your mouth clean.
  - Use an extra soft or sensitive toothbrush.
  - Rinse your mouth before and after meals with plain water or a mild mouth rinse.
    - Mild Mouth Rinse:
      - 1 quart of water
      - 1/2 to 1 teaspoon of salt
      - 1 teaspoon of baking soda
  - Floss regularly
  - Gently brush your tongue as well.

- Use a cool mist humidifier to moisten room air, especially at night. (Be sure to keep the humidifier clean and change the water daily to avoid spreading bacteria or mold in the air.)
- Keep lips moist with lip balm or moisturizer.
- Ask your healthcare team about oral moistening gels and saliva substitutes such as Biotene<sup>®</sup> products.
- If you are receiving radiation treatments, ask your healthcare team if prescription medicines, such as amifostine (Ethyol<sup>®</sup>) or pilocarpine (Salagen<sup>®</sup>) may help prevent thick saliva.
- If you experience soft white patches on your tongue or reddish inflammation in your mouth, notify your healthcare provider. These are not symptoms of dry mouth. This is known as mucositis, which is very common after chemotherapy and/or radiation treatment.

**Things to avoid:**

- Commercial mouthwashes that contain alcohol such as Scope<sup>®</sup> and Listerine<sup>®</sup>
- Alcoholic beverages
- Tobacco and vaping products
- Caffeine-containing drinks or food such as coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate
- Dry foods such as crackers, breads, tough meats
- Very hot foods
- Foods that stick to the roof of your mouth
- Licking your lips
- Acidic and spicy foods

Call your healthcare team if your symptoms worsen.

**If you are in need of immediate assistance, please call 732-235-2465 and select the option that best meets your needs.**