

Dry Mouth in Older Adults

By Dr. J.C. Romero
General Dentist Sun City, California

Saliva enhances our quality of life and is often taken for granted until it is diminished. Those with a decreased ability to produce saliva experience xerostomia, commonly known as dry mouth.

Studies show that 30 percent of those 65 years and older, experience dry mouth. Although complaints of xerostomia are common in older populations, it is not a normal part of the ageing process. In the older population, it is typically caused as a side effect to various systemic diseases and medications.

Causes of Dry Mouth

Xerostomia is caused when the glands in the mouth that produce saliva have decreased production. The most common cause of dry mouth is the use of medications. More than 400 medications are associated with dry mouth. Medications for high blood pressure, depression, insomnia, allergies, Alzheimer's, and lung diseases all may have xerostomia as a side effect.

Some conditions such as: menopause, diabetes, and Sjogren's Syndrome are associated with dry mouth. Treatments for cancer may cause temporary or even permanent damage to the salivary glands.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of dry mouth are:

- a sticky, dry feeling in the mouth or throat
- a burning sensation in the mouth
- trouble in chewing, swallowing or speaking
- difficulty in sleeping due to irritating oral dryness
- bad breath
- increased plaque, tooth decay and gum disease

Consequences of Dry Mouth

When the delicate balance in our mouth is disrupted by a decrease in saliva, the consequences can be rapid and severe.

Fungal infections is often found in the mouths of those who have xerostomia. Fungal overgrowth can lead to a pain-

ful burning sensation in the mouth, tongue, and corners of the mouth. Medications prescribed by your dentist or physician, can control oral fungal infections.

Rampant tooth decay is a common problem. A person may go decades without a cavity, but aggressive cavities can quickly form with the onset of xerostomia. Saliva serves to wash away sugars and food debris from the teeth. Without the cleansing properties of saliva, decay can quickly form as sugars remain in prolonged contact

with the teeth. Those who wear bridges or partial dentures need to be vigilant, since they are more susceptible to tooth decay.

The lack of saliva can also affect the ability to wear dentures. Denture wearers often have frequent sore spots and loose dentures. The discomfort may be so severe that the denture may be unusable.

What Can be Done

Although there are no easy solutions to a dry mouth, there are steps that can be taken to decrease its symptoms and harmful effects:

- sip water often
- use oral moisturizing products such as Biotene or Oasis
- avoid drinks with caffeine
- chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless hard candy
- do not use tobacco or alcohol
- use a humidifier at night
- brush and floss your teeth at least twice per day
- use toothpaste with fluoride -a prescription strength fluoride may be recommended by your dentist
- avoid sticky and sugary foods
- twice a year dental checkups to catch tooth decay in its early stages.

For some, the sensation of having a dry mouth is merely a nuisance. For others, the condition causes a significant impact to their health and quality of life. Dry mouth should not be ignored. With the aid of your dentist and physician, early management of xerostomia can help minimize many of its potential harmful effects.

Dr. J. C. Romero practices dentistry in Sun City, California (951) 679-5313. Graduate of the UCLA School of Dentistry. His office is located at 27830 Bradley Road, Sun City, CA 92586 . Or visit www.JCRomeroDDS.com.



FAMILY DENTISTRY FOR PATIENTS OF ALL AGES

We welcome you to our courteous and friendly dental office



J.C. Romero *UCLA*



- Dental Exams
- Cleanings
- Tooth Colored Fillings
- Crowns & Bridges
- Cosmetic Dentistry
- Dental Emergencies
- New Dentures & Repairs
- Teeth Whitening
- Root Canals
- Dental Implant Restorations

Serving Sun City / Menifee Valley

(951) 679-5313

Most Insurance Accepted • Senior Discounts
No Interest Financing Available (OAC)



J. C. ROMERO D.D.S.
— FAMILY DENTISTRY —

27830 Bradley Rd - Sun City

(Bradley North of McCall / Next to Sun City Fire Station)

www.JCRomeroDDS.com

