



### **How Can Oral Health Care Providers Determine If Patients Have Dry Mouth?**

Patients who have rheumatoid arthritis should be screened for xerostomia, which is a dryness in the mouth often caused by reduced saliva. This can predispose these patients to dental cavities. Researchers found that 60% of 604 rheumatoid arthritis patients had one or more xerostomia symptoms, including difficulty swallowing, a dry mouth when eating or the need to drink liquids to facilitate swallowing. However, only 43% actually had reduced saliva flow. Those who had the most symptoms were most likely to have reduced saliva flow.

People with this condition have an increased risk of dental cavities and oral fungal infections. It is better to identify these patients before these complications happen. A study is conducted to determine whether the Schirmer test for measuring eye dryness can be modified to measure mouth dryness. The results of the modified Schirmer test are able to distinguish between healthy adult volunteers and subjects who experienced profound xerostomia and hyposalivation.

<http://www.faqs.org/abstracts/Health/Investigation-of-xerostomia-in-patients-with-rheumatoid-arthritis.html>

Dry Mouth is one of the most widespread outcomes of taking systemic medications. It not only affects the individual's quality of life, but can also lead to disease states including dental decay and other infections. More than 500 medications are reported to cause xerostomia. Classes of medications that can lead to dry mouth include anti-hypertensives (blood pressure medication), antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, anti-psychotics, antihistamines, decongestants, appetite suppressants, anti-Parkinson drugs, diuretics; and the list goes on.

People who have dry mouth may have trouble tasting food, chewing, swallowing and even speaking. Those who suffer from this condition complain of a burning or sticky feeling in their mouth and may show signs of dry lips or a rough dry tongue. In those who have kept their natural teeth, lack of saliva can lead to tooth decay due to decreased buffering of oral acids. As their mouths get drier, patients with xerostomia use hard candies to alleviate the dryness. While making people feel like they are doing something for their dry mouth, sucking on hard candies actually contributes to tooth decay.

Even older adults without natural teeth are at risk for oral complications from dry mouth. Lack of saliva makes it much more difficult and uncomfortable to wear dentures or partial dentures. In addition, dry mouth makes people -- especially those suffering from diabetes and patients who use inhalers -- more susceptible to oral fungal infections. Be sure to encourage elders who use inhalers to rinse their mouths with water after each inhaler use.

<http://www.asaging.org/asav2/han/enews/07may/top.cfm>

Dry socket is the most common complication of an extraction. It develops in about 5% of tooth extractions and is a very painful condition that is easily treated. This often occurs two or more days after an extraction and can last about 5-6 days. It is normal to have soreness and discomfort following an extraction.

The condition exists when a blood clot is dislodged from the surgery site thus exposing the bone and fine nerve endings. The blood clot helps in the stopping of bleeding and lays the foundation or framework for new tissue and bone to develop over a two-month healing process. It is more common in the mandibular area and in back teeth due to poorer circulation in this area, with wisdom teeth being the most common site. Dry socket delays the healing process.

[http://www.dentalgentlecare.com/dry\\_socket.htm](http://www.dentalgentlecare.com/dry_socket.htm)

Xerostomia (dry mouth), which is a risk factor for dental decay (caries) and periodontal disease, is due to lack of saliva either from disease, age, or use of medications such as antidepressants, anti-psychotics, urinary antispasmodics, diuretics, beta-blockers, bronchodilators, gastrointestinal agents, anti-cholinergics, and anti-Parkinson's disease agents. The pharmacist or dentist should communicate with the individual's physician about either switching the medication to a similar drug with a different classification that has less xerostomic side effects or lowering the dosage.

[http://www.uspharmacist.com/content/t/oral\\_health/c/10320/](http://www.uspharmacist.com/content/t/oral_health/c/10320/)

Diabetics may experience diminished salivary flow and burning mouth or tongue. Dry mouth (xerostomia) also may develop, causing an increased incidence of decay. Gum recession has been found to occur more frequently and more extensively in moderate and poorly-controlled diabetic patients because plaque responds differently, creating more harmful proteins in the gums. To prevent problems with bacterial infections in the mouth, your dentist may prescribe antibiotics, medicated mouth rinses, and more frequent cleanings.

<http://www.advanceddental.ca/dentalServices/diabetes.htm>

Dry mouth occurs when the salivary glands in the mouth do not produce enough saliva to keep it moist. Most people experience dry mouth once in a while, such as when they are nervous, upset or under stress. Dry mouth can also be a symptom of inadequate fluid intake, which can result in dehydration (loss of fluids from the body).

Occasional xerostomia is not usually a cause for concern and can be relieved by drinking plenty of fluids, especially water. Implementing lifestyle changes, such as reducing intake of caffeine and avoiding use of alcohol and tobacco, also help relieve dry mouth. However, chronic dry mouth may be a symptom of an illness, such as diabetes, that requires medical treatment.

In addition to dry mouth, a patient may experience other symptoms that may help physicians determine the cause of xerostomia. These include dysphagia (difficulty swallowing), sore throat, bad breath and headache.

<http://yourtotalhealth.ivillage.com/dry-mouth.html>

Saliva lubricates and moistens the mouth. It is essential for chewing, tasting, swallowing, and talking. The enzymes in saliva help the body to digest food and protect teeth from cavities.

Dry mouth is sometimes described as "cotton mouth". Some people say that their tongue sticks to the inside of their cheek. Burning and cracks in the tongue may occur. Saliva may feel dry, thick and/or ropery. A dry mouth can make it difficult to chew and swallow food. Changes in taste may occur. Speech may be altered.

Dry mouth also increases your risk of infection and can cause dental cavities. Using tobacco products and drinking alcoholic beverages can make these symptoms worse.

<http://cancerinfo.cancer.iu.edu/cancerportal/public/symptoms/drymouth.php>