DRY MOUTH  
(ALSO KNOWN AS XEROSTOMIA)

How do I keep my teeth healthy?

• Brush your teeth at least two times a day with a toothpaste containing fluoride—use an electric toothbrush if you find it easier.
• Floss or use another between-the-teeth cleaner every day.
• Visit a dentist regularly for a cleaning and checkup.
• Quit smoking.
• If you have dentures, clean them daily.
• Use an antibacterial mouth rinse.

For dental services, you may contact:
• New York University  
  College of Dentistry  
  www.nyu.edu/dental (click on “patients,” or you may email dentalcare@nyu.edu)

Or, for a dental provider near you, call or go on the web:
• In Manhattan  
  New York County Dental Society  
  212.573.8500  
  http://www.nycdentsociety.org/consumer/index.html
• In Brooklyn or Staten Island  
  Second District Dental Society  
  718.522.3939  
  http://www.sddsny.org/referrals
• In Queens, the Bronx, or outside NYC  
  Find a dentist ADA service:  
  http://www.ada.org/ada/findadentist/advancedsearch.aspx

Dry mouth is not a normal part of aging—see your dentist or physician if you have symptoms of dry mouth.
What is dry mouth?
A persistent feeling that there is not enough saliva in your mouth.

Why is dry mouth a problem?
• It causes difficulties in tasting, chewing, swallowing, and speaking
• Increases your chance of developing dental decay
• Makes your mouth tissues sore and uncomfortable
• Makes the mouth more likely to develop some infections

Why is saliva so important?
• Saliva helps lubricate your mouth so you can chew and swallow.
• Saliva protects teeth from decay.
• Saliva helps prevent infection by controlling bacteria and fungi in the mouth.

What are the symptoms of dry mouth?
• A sticky, dry feeling in the mouth
• Trouble chewing, swallowing, tasting, or speaking
• A burning feeling in the mouth
• A dry feeling in the throat
• Cracked lips
• A dry, rough tongue
• Mouth sores
• An infection in the mouth

The technical term for dry mouth is xerostomia (ZEER-oh-STOH-mee-ah)

What causes dry mouth?
• Medications
• Medical treatment such as radiation therapy to the head and neck for cancer
• Chemotherapy for cancer
• Some health conditions (for example: diabetes, HIV/AIDS or Sjogren’s Syndrome—even some types of arthritis may cause dry mouth!)

What can you do about dry mouth?
• Sip water or sugarless drinks often.
• Avoid drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea, and some sodas. Caffeine can dry out the mouth.
• Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless hard candy to stimulate saliva flow. Avoid sour tasting candies, even if sugarless, as they may erode teeth. Cinnamon or mint-flavored candies are good choices, though the flavors may be too intense.
• Don’t use tobacco or alcohol. They dry out the mouth.
• Use a humidifier at night.

More Information on Sjogren’s Syndrome
The main symptoms of Sjogren’s syndrome are dry mouth and dry eyes. For information about dry mouth related to Sjogren’s syndrome, contact:
Sjogren’s Syndrome Foundation, Inc.
6707 Democracy Blvd., Suite 325
Bethesda, MD 20817
Tel: 1.800.475.6473
http://www.sjogrens.org

Portions of this pamphlet reprinted from NIH Publication No. 11-3174