

Dry Mouth and/or Thick Saliva

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APPLIES TO ANYONE WITH DRY MOUTH, NOT JUST CANCER PATIENTS

Summary:

Dry mouth and thick saliva can be a problem for some individuals undergoing cancer treatment. If you are having trouble eating because you have a dry mouth or thick saliva, TALK to your health care team. It might be possible for your health care team to recommend or provide medications or other options to decrease these symptoms. Your health care team can help you determine which medications will work best to help you manage a dry mouth and/or thick saliva. However, in addition to medication, there are many nutrition steps you can take to help you cope with a dry mouth. The following article provides nutrition tips and tricks you can use to help you eat enough, even if you don't feel like eating because of a dry mouth and/or thick saliva.

Article:

Always talk to your health care team about diet and nutrition changes you'd like to try. If you have questions, talk to your health care team to determine what is best for you.

A dry mouth can increase risk of cavities and other mouth infections. Be sure you receive plenty of dental care before, during, and after your treatment for cancer! Your health care team can help you arrange dental care as needed.

Nutrition Tips for Dry Mouth and/or Thick Saliva

- Weight loss can be a problem for some individuals undergoing treatment for cancer. If you need more tips on preventing weight loss during treatment, please see our articles [**Weight Loss: Increasing Healthy Calories & Protein**](#) and [**Poor Appetite & Early Fullness**](#).
- Drink 8 to 12 cups (8 oz cups) of non-caffeinated liquids each day. Drinking plenty of fluid can help loosen mucus.

- For thick saliva, try sipping 100% pure, papaya juice. Papaya contains natural substances that will help thin and 'cut' thick saliva.
- Take a water bottle with you EVERY time you leave home.
- If helpful, use a straw to drink liquid.
- When eating, take small bites and chew food completely. Avoid rushing when you eat!
- Eat soft, moist foods that are cool or room temperature.
- Soften food with milk. Research shows that milk may help prevent cavities and may help moisturize a dry mouth.
- Use a blender to mash, puree, or blend fruits & vegetables.
- Try soft cooked chicken and fish; thinned cereals, such as oatmeal made with plenty of water or milk; popsicles, shakes, smoothies, and slushies; and warm soups and stews. Avoid very hot foods, but make sure your foods are cooked fully, before cooling to a warm temperature for eating.
- Try casseroles that contain a lot of liquid, such as those made with soup.
- Add broth, sauces, gravy, or soup to soften and moisten foods.
- Use yogurt, juice, or jelly to make foods 'slide' down a dry throat easier.
- Sip warm, non-caffeinated tea.
- Instead of butter or margarine, try using a little olive oil, canola oil, avocado oil, or almond oil to make foods slippery and easier to swallow.
- Try sucking on frozen fruit. Frozen grapes, wedges of cantaloupe, peach slices, and watermelon are tasty.
- Suck on ice chips. Do NOT chew ice - this can damage your teeth.
- Try fruit that contains a lot of water such as watermelon, peaches, nectarines, and strawberries.

- Try canned fruit which is soft. Plus it is already in liquid, making it easier to swallow.
- Focus on EXCELLENT mouth care. Rinse your mouth before and after meals with plain water or a mild solution made with 1 quart of water, 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon baking soda.
- Try products made by *Biotene*. *Biotene* makes alcohol-free mouthwashes, anti-bacterial toothpastes, and gums that stimulate saliva production. Your pharmacist can help you find these products in the pharmacy.
- Try oral moisturizers. These are different from saliva substitutes. Some people who do not like saliva substitutes do like mouth moisturizers. Ask your pharmacist about these products. Examples of oral moisturizers are *Moistin*, *Mouth Kote*, *Optimoist*, *Oral Balance*, or *Oral Moist*.
- Try saliva substitutes. Ask your pharmacist about these products. Examples of saliva substitutes are *Salivart*, *Xerolube*, and *Glandosane*.

Avoid the following foods or products, which may worsen a dry mouth or cause mouth pain

- Avoid or limit caffeinated foods and beverages such as coffee, caffeinated tea, colas, and chocolate.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages including beer, wine, and mixed drinks. Alcohol will dry the mouth further.
- Avoid dry foods including tough meats, raw vegetables, breads, pretzels, rice, chips, muffins, and cakes.
- Avoid commercial mouthwashes. These contain alcohol which will dry the mouth further.
- Avoid licking your lips. This will dry them out further. Ask your medical care team about what type of moisturizer you can use on your lips. Chapstick and petroleum jelly usually are appropriate.

Call Your Medical Care Team If...

- You have a severely dry mouth for more than 3 days.
- Your lips are dry, cracked, and/or bleeding.

- You have mouth sores that are preventing you from eating or that won't heal.
- You notice white patches in your mouth. This may be an infection that requires medication.
- You have difficulty breathing due to dry mouth or throat.

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