**DRY MOUTH SYNDROME**

Dry mouth is usually the result of having decreased saliva production. Saliva is produced in the major and minor salivary glands of the mouth. Approximately a quart of saliva is produced each day. When we are young, our saliva is a mixture of mainly water with a small percentage of proteins and mucin. Saliva is important because it helps lubricate the vocal cords for phonation and the esophagus for swallowing. Saliva is also important because the protein helps to protect our teeth from cavities. Unfortunately as we age, the water content of our saliva decreases, but the other proteins and mucin do not decrease nearly as much. This tends to create thicker saliva as we get older. This is evident in the difference between the very watery saliva of a drooling baby compared to the thicksaliva of an older person, which can be so dense and sticky that it clumps behind the palate and is retained around the vocal cords, causing a constant need for sniffing the nose and clearing the throat. The loss of saliva lubricating the vocal cords is also the reason for loss of quality in the voice of older singers, and often is the cause for them to stop singing.

Some medications and medical conditions can cause increased dryness of the throat. This is particularly true of antihistamines and decongestants and some blood pressure medicines. In addition, medications for depression can produce this problem. Parkinson’s disease is almost always accompanied with dryness in the upper airway. Sjogren’s disease is an autoimmune disease that leads to arthritis and loss of production of all the secretory glands including the tear glands and saliva glands. True dehydration can also cause this problem, but only temporarily.

**TREATMENT:** None of the treatments for dry mouth are completely effective, as it is usually related to aging. There is also no surgery to correct this problem. There are, however, aids that can be tried and work for some patients:

* First, increase the daily amount of water intake. Adding lemon or lime concentrates to your drinking water helps cut mucus.
* Decreasing dairy products is important, as it is a source of mucin. Those who have a high intake of cheese, ice cream, and milk tend to have thicker phlegm.
* Mouth Kote is available as an over‑the-counter mucus-cutting agent. It is available in most pharmacies. Some people prefer Bioten, Oro-balance gel or Oasis mouthwash. These are usually available at local pharmacies on an over-the-counter basis.

Dry mouth causes discomfort, frustration, and hoarseness, but it is not a cause of frank pain. If you have oral or throat pain, please contact our office.

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