

Your Dry Mouth Could be Killing Your Teeth

Dr. Lee Sheldon

What do over 500 medications have in common? The medications treat various chronic problems all over the body. But they can create major problems for your teeth. Why? Because these medications reduce saliva production. They cause dry mouth.

Saliva just doesn't make our mouths wet, it protects our teeth from bacterial attack. Good, healthy saliva acts as a buffer to neutralize acidic foods. No saliva? Your mouth's acid level increases. The acid-loving bacteria in your mouth have a field day. Our teeth decay. And this decay is not just a nuisance, repaired by a simple filling. It can dissolve exposed roots. And sometimes it happens so fast that nothing can be done to save the tooth, and it needs to be extracted.

Dry mouth can occur as a result of some chronic diseases such as Sjogren's syndrome. It can occur following radiation therapy to the head and mouth region as well as after chemotherapy.

So what's the solution? If you are taking medications that are causing dry mouth, one thing you can do is to ask your physician if there is an alternative medication. Barring that, we need to do our best to keep the mouth moist and the acid reduced. A constant water bottle by your side is one solution. But even then, there is no assurance that the mouth acids will be neutralized. I have my patients rinse with baking soda rinses up to four times a day. Make a solution of 1 tablespoon of baking soda to 8 ounces of water. Rinse for 1 minute and spit out. The 8 ounces of water should last the full day.

There are artificial salivas that you can purchase from your pharmacy as well.

There is a natural sugar that actually can reverse tooth decay, xylitol. Xylitol comes as a straight granulated sugar. I recommend however that you purchase xylitol mints or xylitol gum. Make sure that the mints or gum are 100% xylitol with no other added sugars. Dissolve 5 mints a day or chew 5 pieces of gum a day spread throughout the day. You can find xylitol in health food stores and many dental offices.

An excellent rinse to help prevent dental decay is Cari-Free. It combines an acid modifier, xylitol, and modifies the bacterial imbalance in the mouth. It can be ordered online at carefree.com

Finally, increase the frequency of your dental examinations.

Dry mouth can be devastating to your teeth. It requires a change in how you treat your mouth even if you haven't had a decay problem in the past. Aggressive preventive care can go a long way in reducing your dental expenses as well as your chance of tooth loss.