
Dry Mouth (Xerostomia)

Characteristics: An uncomfortable sensation of dryness due to diminished saliva; can lead to dental caries, because saliva has an antibacterial effect. Can also cause decreased taste and inflammation of gums.

Meds That Cause It: Most psychotropic meds, especially antipsychotics, antidepressants (including SSRIs), lithium, psychostimulants, and medications used to treat or prevent extrapyramidal symptoms (benztropine, diphenhydramine, trihexyphenidyl).

Mechanism: Anticholinergic and other effects.

General Management:

- Encourage aggressive oral hygiene, including more frequent dental cleanings.
- Chew sugarless gum to stimulate saliva production (especially gum containing xylitol, which can also reduce dental caries).
- Sip water frequently.
- Suck on ice chips.

First-Line Medications:

- Biotene line of products, over the counter (most contain lubricants and humectants to “seal in” moisture):
 - Biotene gum, use as needed.
 - Biotene toothpaste, use as with any toothpaste.
 - Biotene oral rinse (mouthwash), rinse up to five times per day.
 - Biotene Oralbalance Gel, use one inch on tongue as needed (comes out of a tube).
 - Biotene moisturizing mouth spray, spray on tongue as needed.
- Many saliva substitutes are available, such as Oralube saliva substitute, Oasis mouth spray, and others. No studies have demonstrated superiority of any single brand.

Second-Line Medications:

- Procholinergic drugs:
 - Pilocarpine (Salagen) 5–10 mg two or three times daily (SE: Sweating, congestion, diarrhea; start with 2.5 mg test dose to ensure tolerability).
 - Cevimeline (Evxac) 30 mg up to three times daily.

Clinical Pearls:

- Caffeine can worsen dry mouth, so recommend decreasing caffeine use.
- Cigarette smoking can also worsen dry mouth, so recommend cessation.
- Don’t shy away from trying procholinergic drugs—some patients prefer them over having to constantly use saliva substitute products.

Fun Fact:

Medications are often blamed, particularly in older patients, but aging itself is a common cause of dry mouth.