

How can I help myself?

- Avoid alcohol and cigarettes, as these will make your dry mouth worse
- Good oral hygiene, including regular tooth brushing and flossing will help
- Have regular dental check ups and clean your dentures regularly
- Try sugar-free hard boiled sweets and/or sugar free gum

Any questions?

If you would like any further advice and information or have any problems, please contact

Specialist Surgery ward: 01872 252828 or 01872 256340

Head & Neck Nurse Specialists: 01872 253475

Oral Surgery: 01872 253980

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690



Dry or painful mouth Following head and neck treatment



Saliva helps keep your mouth moist and free from infection. The side effects of head and neck treatment often include the reduction or absence of saliva, which can lead to a dry and painful mouth. These symptoms are usually temporary, but may be permanent in some cases. This is a common problem that can be very uncomfortable and may lead to oral infections and tooth decay.

What are the symptoms?

These include:

- dry mouth
- pain around the inside of your mouth and on your tongue
- oral infections and tooth decay
- tongue swelling
- swallowing problems
- speech problems
- difficulty opening your mouth.

What causes it?

Some of the common causes include:

- cancer or tumour
- head and neck surgery, such as removal or damage to your salivary glands
- radiotherapy/chemotherapy, which can damage cells in the mouth
- following radioiodine treatment
- viral, bacterial or fungal infection
- oxygen therapy
- dehydration
- poor oral hygiene
- dentures
- alcohol and smoking
- breathing through your mouth
- some medicines.

What treatments are available?

- Rinse your mouth regularly with a mouthwash - depending on the cause of the problem this can be either
 - one specifically for dry mouth
 - antiseptic
 - antifungal
- Take regular pain killers in the form of mouthwashes and/or tablets
- Try warm salt water or bicarbonate-water mouthwashes (½ teaspoon to a glass of water). The salt water solution may be used as a spray.
- Drinking and sipping water frequently will help to reduce symptoms, but at times this is not enough
- Sucking crushed ice chips may be helpful for a dry mouth following radiotherapy when possible ulceration has resolved.

Saliva replacement products are available to help and include the following:

- Biotene oral balance gel
- Oralieve gel
- BioXtra gel
- Xerotin artificial saliva
- Saliva Orthana mouth spray (mucin based)
- Glandosane mouth spray (not recommended for patients with their own teeth)
- Salivix pastilles
- Saliveze spray
- Oralieve moisturising mouth spray.

These are available from the hospital pharmacy for inpatients and on prescription for outpatients. Your GP or Dentist can also prescribe them.