

Relief for dry mouth

Dry mouth is more than uncomfortable. It promotes tooth decay and bad breath, and contributes to other oral health problems.

Your salivary glands help keep your mouth moist. Saliva makes it possible for you to chew and swallow, helps digest food, protects teeth from decay by washing away food and debris, and prevents infection by controlling bacteria in the mouth.

The causes of dry mouth range from medications – hundreds of drugs list dry mouth as a possible side effect – to emotional stress to radiation treatment to hormone changes. Talk to your doctor or dentist to determine the cause and treatment.

You can take simple steps to minimize the discomfort and improve the flow:

- › Sip water or sugarless drinks often to keep the mouth moist
- › Use a fluoride toothpaste and fluoride rinse
- › Avoid drinks with caffeine that can dry out the mouth
- › Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless hard candy to stimulate saliva
- › Avoid tobacco and alcohol that dry out the mouth
- › Use an over-the-counter artificial saliva substitute

Without the natural cleansing provided by saliva, tooth decay and other oral health problems increase. Taking good care of your teeth and gums every day, as well as regular dental checkups, are especially important if you have dry mouth.

Source: National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research



Take care with toothpicks

Keep a light touch if you need to use wooden toothpicks to get rid of food trapped between teeth when your toothbrush and floss aren't available. Even better, reach for softer alternatives – some even have tiny, flexible rubber bristles.

Aggressive handling of wooden toothpicks can damage tooth enamel, injure gums, break a tooth, and damage the roots, especially if gums have pulled away from the teeth and root surfaces are exposed, according to www.dentistry.com. It also can chip or break bonding or veneers if you aren't careful.

Use toothpicks sparingly, and never as a substitute for brushing and flossing.

Are you losing sight of your eye health?

Many people aren't paying enough attention to their eyesight and overall eye health, a recent study found.

Most eye and vision problems have no obvious signs or symptoms, so people often are unaware that a problem exists. Early diagnosis and treatment of eye and vision problems are important to maintain good vision and eye health and, when possible, prevent vision loss.

The poll commissioned by the American Optometric Association also found:

- › As they age, respondents were worried more about losing their vision than their memory, their ability to walk, or their hair.
- › Even though concerns about vision problems are common, 15 percent of people who don't wear any form of vision correction have never been to an eye doctor.
- › Sixty-two percent of respondents didn't know that signs of diabetes may be detected by an eye doctor, while 71 percent didn't know that a comprehensive eye exam can detect hypertension, brain tumors (75 percent), cancer (78 percent), cardiovascular disease (80 percent), and multiple sclerosis (90 percent).

Try yogurt for a more beautiful smile

Yogurt eaters are less likely to suffer from gum disease and tooth loss.

A study found that only a couple of ounces of yogurt a day are beneficial, www.RealAge.com reports. Researchers speculate that there's something about the healthy bacteria in yogurt that helps protect teeth and gums. They may help balance out the bad bacteria in your mouth, just the way they do in your intestines.

Here are four more off-the-beaten-path ways from RealAge to protect your teeth:

- › **Skip the soda.** Sodas, both sugary and diet, may hasten erosion of your tooth enamel. It's not just sugar. Total acid content and acid type – look for phosphoric, citric, malic, and tartaric – in a beverage affect the strength of the acid attack on the enamel.
- › **Get some straws.** If you can't stay away from fizzy soda, sip it through a straw with the end placed near the back of your mouth to decrease contact time between your teeth and the acids.
- › **Drink diet or low-sugar red cranberry juice.** Its compounds appear to keep bacteria from sticking to teeth, which could thwart tooth decay.
- › **Brush gently.** Brushing too long or too hard can damage tooth enamel and gums, and isn't any better at removing plaque than gentler, shorter movements.

