

**Other notes:**

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**Your speech pathologist is:**

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**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Hours:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Useful web sites/ resources:**

Southern Melbourne Integrated Cancer Services  
[www.baysidehealth.org.au/speech\\_pathology/rad\\_onc\\_handouts/](http://www.baysidehealth.org.au/speech_pathology/rad_onc_handouts/)  
[www.entdocs.com/images/salivarygland.gif](http://www.entdocs.com/images/salivarygland.gif)  
[www.drymouth.info](http://www.drymouth.info)

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# Speech Pathology and Radiation Oncology

## Dry Mouth (Xerostomia)



health · care · people

## What is xerostomia?

Xerostomia means dry mouth. The saliva that lines your mouth plays an important role in eating, drinking, talking, and protecting your teeth. Your salivary glands are located around your jaw and under your tongue.

A dry mouth can occur for a short time or be a permanent side effect of radiation therapy and or surgery.

A dry mouth can lead to –

- Mouth discomfort
- Difficulty swallowing food
- Reduced protection for your teeth which could lead to rapid tooth decay

## Why do some patients who have radiation therapy get xerostomia?

- 1) Radiation therapy can affect the functioning of the salivary glands.
- 2) If your salivary glands are within the area treated by radiation therapy you may develop xerostomia. You may produce less saliva and it can become thick.

## What is the speech pathologist's role?

Your speech pathologist is a specialist in managing swallowing difficulties. As xerostomia can affect your ability to eat and drink, your speech pathologist may recommend ideas to keep your mouth moist, clear thick saliva, or make changes to your foods and fluids to make it easier to chew and/ or swallow. They may also be able to provide you with special exercise to help you swallow.

Your speech pathologist together with the dietitian, doctor, dentist and nurse can recommend ways to manage xerostomia. If the dryness in your mouth is causing swallowing difficulties he or she may be able to help.

## What can I do to moisten my mouth?

### Swallowing tips

- Always have a drink with your meals. Add extra sauces and gravy to food. Avoid dry flaky food. This will make chewing and swallowing easier, and prevent food from sticking in your mouth/throat. It may also improve the taste of food. Have a drink after each mouthful of food.

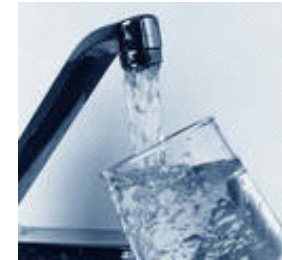
### Saliva stimulants

- Chew sugar-free gum to stimulate saliva

### Mouth moisturisers

- Keep a bottle of water or a spray bottle with you at all times to help moisten your mouth and throat.
- Keep water at your bedside at night and sip it regularly if you frequently wake with a dry mouth.
- GC Dry Mouth Gel or Biotene oral moisturising gel, may reduce the need to wake for a drink at night.
- Use artificial saliva substitutes to coat your mouth. Your dentist, speech pathologist and nurse can recommend some for you eg. Oralube, Hamilton aqua spray. Ask your dentist or chemist about products they stock.
- Regularly use the mouth care suggestions provided to you by your dentist or nurse. (Refer to the brochure on Mouth Care for more information).
- Sucking on ice cubes, frozen dark grape juice, or sugar-free lollies may encourage saliva production.
- Use humidification (refer to the brochure on Humidification and Radiation Therapy). Ask the nurses in the radiation therapy department if they have a humidification system available for patient use. Alternatively some chemists also hire out humidification systems. Ask your speech pathologist or nurse for details of these systems.

- Always have a drink with your meals. Add extra sauces and gravy to food. Avoid dry flaky food. This will make chewing and swallowing easier, and prevent food from sticking in your mouth/throat. It may also improve the taste of food. Have a drink after each mouthful of food.



## What can make my mouth drier?

The following things can make your mouth even drier.

- Caffeine can dry out the mouth. Drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea and cola soft-drinks should be avoided.
- Cigarettes and alcohol
- Spicy or salty foods
- Sugary drinks

## Long term effects after radiation therapy

Radiation therapy can permanently change the make up of your saliva. A dry mouth is a common side effect following radiation therapy.

You should discuss mouth moistening ideas further with your speech pathologist, doctor and/ or dentist.