

Radiation therapy to the head and neck area can reduce the amount of saliva and cause dry mouth. Many drugs such as those used to control pain and nausea may also add to mouth dryness temporarily. In some cases mouth dryness can be long term.

Lack of saliva can contribute to difficulty with eating, talking, and oral health issues such as thicker secretions. It is very important to maintain good oral health and consult with your dentist regularly.

## Tips to Keep Your Mouth Moist and Healthy

- **Carry a small bottle or spray bottle of water** with you to help moisten your mouth during conversation.
- **Suck on ice chips** to refresh your mouth.
- **Commercial saliva substitutes** such as moisturizing gels, mouth rinses or sprays may provide some relief. Keep a glass of water or a “mouth wetting agent” by your bedside.
  - Examples of mouth wetting agents include: Biotene® spray or mouth rinse, Mouth Kote® and Moi-Stir®
- **Keep your mouth moist** with water based gels such as: Xero-Lube® or Biotene Oral Balance® gel.
- **Use lip moisturizers** that have a lanolin (Lanolelle®) or cocoa butter base.
- **Use alcohol free commercial mouth washes.**
- **Avoid smoking and consuming alcoholic** beverages that can contribute to mouth dryness.
- Try a **humidifier** at night, to help moisten the air.
- **If saliva glands are working but at low levels**, sugarless gum, candy or pastilles sweetened with xylitol such as Xyli Melts® may help stimulate any saliva you have available.
- Ask your doctor or dentist about **medications to help stimulate saliva.**
- **Use a mouth rinse** (recipe in this handout) before and after eating and before bed OR every 2 hours to help keep your mouth moist, clean and well lubricated.

## Mouth Rinse Recipe and Instructions

- Mix 2.5 mL (1/2 **teaspoon**) of **baking soda** and 2.5 mL (1/2 **teaspoon**) of **salt** in 500 mL (2 **cups**) of **warm water**.
- Store rinse in a container with a lid and keep it at room temperature.
- Shake well before using.
- Rinse and gargle with about ~1 tablespoon of the rinse mixture, then spit and repeat 2 more times.
- Make a new batch every day.

## Eating Tips

- **Drink 8-10 cups of liquid** each day.
- **Limit drinks containing caffeine** (coffee, tea, cola drinks) and alcohol as they may cause additional dryness.
- Take 2-3 **sips of liquid with each bite** of food to help “wash” food down.
- If appropriate, **use a straw to drink** thick liquids such as liquid food supplements, milkshakes or nectars.
- **Dunk or soak dry foods** in liquids such as herbal tea, milk, hot cocoa, soups or broth.
- **Add extra liquids** to stews, casseroles and simmered foods.
- Pour **sauces and gravies** over vegetables, fish, chicken, meats or bread.
- Use **extra butter and salad dressings** in sandwiches and use crustless bread.
- **Avoid sticky and sugary foods** that will promote tooth decay.
  - Examples of foods to avoid: sweetened beverages, fruit juices, dried fruits, candies, chocolates, gum or mints sweetened with sugar, honey, jams, jelly, sugar coated nuts.
- **Limit acidic foods and fluids** such as those containing lemon, pineapple and tomato sauce because they can irritate a dry mouth and damage tooth enamel.
- Be sure to **clean your teeth** and mouth after every meal and snack.

Visit our website:

[www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca)