Beacon Hospital

DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

SALIVARY PROBLEMS

1. Drooling

Drooling is saliva flowing outside the mouth. When drooling occurs, this is not because more saliva is produced. It is more likely because there is a problem with swallowing and the tendency to swallow regularly is reduced. Saliva can build up in the mouth and if the lips are not sealed, saliva can seep out. If the person is leaning forward with their chin down, the problem can be made worse.

Drooling can be caused by medications or by neurological conditions affecting muscles in the mouth or throat. Drooling can be embarrassing socially and some people with drooling problems are at increased risk of breathing saliva, food, or fluids into the lungs (if you suspect this, request a swallow assessment). This may cause harm if there is a problem with the body's normal reflexes (such as gagging and coughing).

Drooling can be managed in numerous ways. In most cases, it is managed conservatively. Sometimes, it can be treated with medicines. Less frequently, significant drooling can be treated surgically.

Drooling Managment	Conservative management
	• Try to keep an upright seating posture • Keep your chin level • Use a neck collar if necessary to support head position • Try to breathe through your nose and keep your lips sealed • Swallow regularly so saliva does not have the chance to build up • Wear a “swallow-reminder” badge which beeps to cue swallowing • If drooling at night is troublesome, place a towel on the pillow. • Drink more fluids to replace that lost by drooling • Take sips of water after drinking tea/coffee and after

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	eating - this may reduce staining of clothes caused by drooling. • Drink dark grape juice or apple juice • Try homeopathic remedies/ sage caps/ tablets/ powder (available from Health Food Shops) • Suck Sugar-free citrus lozenges • Try steam inhalation • Have your swallow checked and, if provided, carry out swallow exercises

2. Thickened/tenacious saliva

This can be very distressing and may be caused by dehydration, mouth breathing or saliva evaporating in the mouth. Some ways to manage thick saliva include:

- Increase your fluid intake. Dehydration can cause saliva to thicken.
- Try drinking diluted fruit juice. This may help to thin the saliva.
- Try drinking pineapple juice or eating pineapple chunks as they contain enzymes which help to thin the saliva. If fresh pineapple is too acidic, then try tinned as this can also work.
- There is some evidence that dairy products increase mucus production resulting in thickened saliva. Try cutting down on such produce (e.g. milky drinks) to see if this makes a difference.
- If chewing is not too tiring, then chewing gum (preferably sugar free) may help to thin the saliva.
- Reduce Alcohol/ Caffeine
- A small amount of butter in the mouth can loosen adhering mucous
- If possible eliminate mouth breathing

3. Dry mouth (Xerostomia)

Dry mouth may be a side-effect of medication. It is also caused by irradiation of the head and neck region or by damage to or disease of the salivary glands.

Patients with a persistently dry mouth may develop a burning or scalded sensation and have poor oral hygiene. They are prone to increased dental caries, periodontal disease, intolerance of dentures, and oral infections, particularly candidiasis. Where possible, treatment is directed at the underlying cause of dry mouth. If this is not possible, or is only partially successful, symptomatic treatment is used.

The following simple measures can be used to relieve dry mouth:

- Increase your fluid intake, taking regular sips of cool drinks
- Suck pieces of ice
- Eating partly frozen melon or pineapple chunks
- Reduce your intake of tea/coffee as caffeine can act as a 'drying agent'

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- Breathe through your nose and keep your mouth closed. This will help keep your mouth moist
- Try chewing gum or sucking pastilles (preferably sugar free). This may improve saliva production
- The air in houses with central heating/double glazing can be dry, so try using a humidifier
- Try placing plants around the house and the bedroom as this may also improve the humidity
- Try 'steaming' on a regular basis. Pour hot water in a bowl and inhale the steam with a towel placed over your head. Or use a hand held steamer, available from high street stores
- Ask your GP about prescribing an artificial saliva spray
- Petroleum jelly can be applied to the lips to prevent drying and cracking

Artificial saliva

This can provide useful relief of dry mouth. Properly balanced artificial saliva should be of a neutral pH and contain electrolytes (including fluoride) to correspond approximately to the composition of saliva. Examples include Bioxtra and Glandosane, products include mouth gels, mouth sprays, mouth-rinse and toothpaste.

For enquiries, please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department on
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