



Saliva, dry mouth and oral hygiene



Saliva plays an important role in keeping the mouth healthy. It helps break down food and protects the mouth from drying out.



We all produce about a litre and a half of saliva every day, which we swallow frequently. However, if PSP has affected your ability to swallow effectively you may find that saliva builds up in your mouth, and is difficult to control.



Alternatively, you may find that you experience very thick saliva or mucus which you find difficult to swallow. Or perhaps your medications have left you with a very dry mouth.

It is vitally important to maintain good oral hygiene at all times, particularly whilst dealing with the challenges brought about by any changes in swallowing and saliva production.

Too much saliva

Your healthcare team may be able to prescribe medication to help 'dry up' or reduce excess, watery saliva, but the following natural methods may also provide some relief.

Drinking ginger tea, sage tea or dark grape juice can help to reduce saliva production. However, if you have problems swallowing, be sure to consult with your speech and language therapist on the safest methods for you to drink.

Posture is important. Your granny was right when she told you to sit up straight at mealtimes! Try and keep your head upright too. Your occupational therapist can help if posture issues are affecting your ability to eat.

If you have swallowing difficulties you may naturally start to swallow less frequently. You may find that a swallowing reminder device can help you to manage your saliva more effectively by encouraging you to swallow more often. Your SLT will be able to advise you on reminder tools.
See section on *Swallowing, eating and drinking*.

Sore Skin?

- Dab excess saliva with tissues – it causes less irritation than rubbing
- Use a barrier cream, such as petroleum jelly to reduce soreness
- Sometimes, lip strengthening exercises can help. Again, your SLT or physiotherapist will be able to advise.

Try these:

- Push lips forward as if saying 'oo'
- Spread lips as if saying 'ee'
- Repeat 'oo' and 'ee' six times
- Puff air into the cheeks for as long as possible
- Press your lips tightly together as if saying 'mm'.

Do this series of exercises several times a day if possible.

Saliva too thick?

If you are finding that your saliva is too thick, the first thing to do is make sure you are drinking enough. Try and aim for one to two litres a day. Speak to your GP or SLT if swallowing difficulties are making it hard for you to drink enough fluids.

Top Tips

- Avoid dairy products which can thicken mucus
- Keep caffeinated drinks and alcohol to a minimum
- Suck on crushed ice
- Pineapple contains an enzyme, which breaks down the protein present in thick saliva and mucus. Sipping pineapple juice or eating pureed pineapple can help to reduce these thick secretions.

Dry mouth

If your saliva production is poor you may experience a dry mouth. This can lead to an unpleasant taste and coated tongue, increased dental decay, swallowing difficulties and dryness and cracking of tongue and lips.

Certain foods can affect saliva production. Ask your GP for a referral to a dietitian who can advise.

Other things that might help:

- Drinking enough fluid – up to two litres every day. Taking frequent sips of water helps prevent the mouth from drying. Speak to your GP or SLT if swallowing

difficulties are making it hard for you to drink enough fluids

- Avoiding sugary foods and drinks that may damage your teeth
- Using lip balm or petroleum jelly to moisten lips, and removing dentures at night
- Your GP may be able to prescribe gels or sprays to help with dry mouth.

Teeth

Looking after your teeth is essential and reduces the risk of other oral health problems. If you find brushing difficult due to other symptoms that you may be experiencing, ask your dentist for advice. There is a wide range of products available to help clean the teeth effectively, including curved toothbrushes, dental floss, mouthwashes and special brushes that clean between the teeth. Where possible, ensure that you have regular check-ups with your dentist to help maintain good oral health.