



Central West Specialists

Ear, Nose & Throat Specialist

DRY MOUTH FOLLOWING RADIOTHERAPY

This condition occurs because the radiation damages the large and small glands that produce saliva in the mouth.

This results in difficulty eating and speaking, wearing dentures, change in taste, gland enlargement and oral infections. Dental health is often also affected.

Treatment options:

1. Avoid oral drying agents - drinks and food with high sugar content, and alcohol based mouth rinses.
2. Rinse with salt water/baking soda solution regularly (1/2 tsp salt, 1/2 tsp baking soda in a glass of water)
3. Clean teeth three times daily
4. Lip moisturizers
5. Water bottle or oral saliva replacement (Methylcellulose mouth wash)
6. Pilocarpine to stimulate saliva

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Pilocarpine: is a medication used in Australia for eye conditions. It is an approved medication in the USA for the treatment of dry mouth following radiation therapy. It is only available in Australia however, as a liquid medication.

Possible side effects: sweating, urinary frequency, chills, flushing, dizziness, tearing, stuffy nose, tremor, eye problems, abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhoea and slowed heart rate. The medication cannot be used in patients with uncontrolled emphysema or asthma, glaucoma and acute iritis. It must be used with caution in patients with airway, cardiac, gallbladder and psychiatric illnesses and pregnant or breast feeding women.

Preparation of a pilocarpine solution for treatment of xerostomia

In a standard insulin syringe take 12.5 U (0.125mL) of 4% pilocarpine solution, dilute to 100 U (1mL) with saline.

50 U (0.5 mL) = 2.5mg; 100 U (1mL) – 5.0mg (usual dose)

Use three times daily

The lowest dose to start, is 2.5mg three times daily. The normal dose is 5mg three times daily. Some patients will need up to 10mg three times daily, but this needs to be supervised by your doctor. The maximal response may not occur until 10-12 weeks into treatment.

The medication works by stimulating the saliva glands. Eventually, the glands may recover, but this may take many months, or years.