

## HEALTH

# Don't Be Left High and Dry in the Doctor's Office: Tips for Talking to Your Doctor

NewsUSA

(NU) - "I drink a lot of liquids, and my mouth still feels dry." "Sometimes, chewing, swallowing and even talking can be challenging." "I brush, I floss and I still keep getting cavities." "I'm embarrassed to bring up these symptoms to my doctor. How serious could dry mouth really be?" If this sounds like you, talk to your doctor. While dry mouth may seem manageable on your own, it could be more serious than you think. In many instances, poor oral health can be an indication of a more serious medical condition.

"Any time you notice changes to your health or body, it's important to talk to your doctor because no symptom is insignificant," says Dr. Michael Brennan, DDS, MHS, Director of the Sjögren's Syndrome and Salivary Disorders Center at Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, N.C.

"Many patients ignore symptoms like dry mouth because they think they aren't important, but they could be critical in diagnosing a systemic condition. Some of my patients, for example, simply try to drink more water and don't talk about their dry mouth, which is a hallmark symptom of Sjögren's syndrome," Dr. Brennan says.

Sjögren's syndrome, a chronic autoimmune disorder where the immune cells attack and de-



**If your mouth is dry no matter how much water you drink, you should speak to your doctor.**

stroy moisture-producing glands, affects up to four million Americans – but most people have never heard of it. In fact, the average time from onset of symptoms to diagnosis is almost seven years. One reason for the delay in diagnosis may be that patients wait months (and sometimes even years!) before discussing their symptoms with their doctors. A diagnosis can be challenging, too, because Sjögren's symptoms may mimic those of other medical conditions and can vary from person to person. Additionally, patients may not connect their symptoms, like cavities or cracked lips, with feelings of dry mouth, which means they may not be describing their dry-mouth symptoms accurately or

thoroughly when they finally do speak to a physician.

"If patients speak up sooner and give an accurate account of all of their symptoms, their doctors can address those symptoms and recommend a treatment plan earlier," Dr. Brennan adds.

To make the most of your conversations with your doctor, make sure you are prepared for each visit by using the following tips:

- Be prepared to explain your dry-mouth symptoms in detail, including how they affect your daily activities (e.g., eating at a restaurant, public speaking).
- Tell your doctor if you've been taking any over-the-counter products, lozenges, or other treatments. How you're managing your symptoms now can help your doctor determine a treatment plan that's right for you.
- Be honest! The more accurate information your doctor has, the more he or she can help you.
- Ask questions and take notes during the discussion.
- Leave with a plan of action to manage your symptoms, including follow-up appointments or additional tests.

If you are experiencing dry-mouth symptoms, talk to your health care professional. For more information on the symptoms, testing and diagnosis of Sjögren's syndrome, visit [www.livingwithdryness.com](http://www.livingwithdryness.com).