What is dry mouth?
Dry mouth is also known as Xerostomia. It occurs when there is not enough saliva in the mouth.

What does saliva usually do?
Saliva:
• prevents tooth decay by reducing the number of decay-causing bacteria
• helps to destroy viruses
• cancels out decay-causing mouth acids
• contains phosphorous and calcium. These are important in rebuilding and recycling of the hard tooth covering (enamel)
• moistens food which helps with swallowing
• boosts mouth sensation e.g. the experience of pain, food textures and tastes

What can cause a dry mouth?
Dry mouth can be a result of short and long-term conditions that interfere with saliva production. It is a common side effect of many drugs, including medications for anxiety and depression.

What problems can occur with dry mouth?
• Thick, syrupy saliva
• Rough, dry tongue
• Problems chewing and swallowing (particularly dry foods e.g. biscuits)
• Bad breath
• Mouth ulcers
• Dry and cracked lips
• Increased chance of oral thrush infections
• High rate of tooth decay

Actions for case manager/key worker

Diet-related. Recommend that your consumer:
• Eat chewy foods to stimulate their saliva flow
• Chew their food thoroughly
• Include watery foods in their diet, including pureed fruits and jellies
• Avoid crunchy foods that could injure their mouth, including crackers, corn and potato chips
• Avoid acidic foods and beverages (e.g. soft drinks, sports drinks, citrus fruits and citrus fruit juices such as orange and lemon) to protect their teeth enamel
• Restrict their intake of sugary foods and drinks or avoid them all together
• Avoid mint lollies and mint mouthwashes, as these products can aggravate dry mouth tissue and increase the risk of tooth decay (look for non-mint flavoured mouth washes)
• Avoid substances that increase mouth dryness; including cigarettes, alcohol, caffeinated drinks and spicy foods
• Chew sugarless gums between meals to stimulate the flow of saliva
• Rinse their mouth with water after a sugary drink or food. Also, sip plain tap water often. It may help for them to carry a drink bottle

General. Recommend that your consumer:
• Brush and floss their teeth twice a day
• Consult their pharmacist - there are preparations that help moisten the mouth, including sprays, lozenges or pastes
• Visit the dentist for regular check ups
• If they smoke, quit for good
• Continue to take medication, even if it is to blame for the dry mouth

Need more information or to refer your consumer?
Your consumer can get help from their GP, dentist, or pharmacist.