

Salivary Gland Obstruction

Saliva (spit) is produced in various glands in the head and neck. The saliva then drains through various ducts (pipes) to openings in the mouth. The salivary glands are continuously producing saliva, but are stimulated and more active at the sight or smell of food and the presence of something in the mouth. The strongest stimulus for the production of saliva and the propulsion/pumping of the gland and duct are sour foods and liquids.

Just like the pipes in your house, the salivary ducts can become blocked or plugged. When this happens, there is a back up of saliva and the glands become swollen. Once there is a blockage, the bacteria from the mouth can cause an infection of the gland a result in significant pain, swelling and tenderness over the cheek or under the jaw line.

Blockage of the saliva gland is typically from thickening of the saliva, a decrease in salivary flow and/or the presence of a stone. These issues most commonly occur when someone is dehydrated and not taking in enough fluids. Many medications can lead to a decrease in the production of saliva. An elevation in calcium or other electrolyte abnormalities can also contribute. Occasionally, other underlying medical problems can contribute and may be evaluated by the doctor.

Signs and symptoms that you may have a blocked salivary gland:

- swelling in the cheek or under the jaw line, especially if there are fluctuations related to food intake
- sour or bitter taste in the mouth

Signs or symptoms that you may have an infection of a salivary gland:

- redness or warmth in addition to swelling in the cheek or under the jaw line
- fever, chills

If the gland is blocked +/- infected, pain medications can help alleviate the discomfort and antibiotics may be used to kill the bacteria, but ***the plumbing must be cleared for the problem to resolve. In order to clear the blockage, you must:***

- **drink plenty of fluids**
- **avoid dehydrating situations and foods (saunas, strenuous work outs, caffeine, alcohol, etc...)**
- **massage the gland to stimulate the flow of saliva**
- **“milk” the gland from back to front (in the direction of the duct) to plunge the blocked area**
- **apply warm compresses**
- **take sour candies, suck on lemons/limes to stimulate saliva production and flow**
- **anti-inflammatory medications may be prescribed (Advil, Motrin, Ibuprofen, Aleve, Aspirin)**

These recommendations can sometimes be uncomfortable to perform but are still necessary to clear the problem. Just like plunging any pipe, a certain amount of pressure needs to be built up to clear the obstruction. Once clear, if proper care is not taken, another obstruction can occur.