

Scientist seeks solutions for cancer patients with dry mouth

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For several years, Wilmot Cancer Institute scientist Catherine Ovitt, Ph.D., has been investigating ways to protect and regenerate the salivary gland, which can be damaged during radiation treatment for head and neck cancer. Her lab's latest study focuses on the cells that secrete saliva—discovering the ways in which several different cell populations have the potential to restore salivary gland function.

The research suggests the exciting possibility that scientists could stimulate the surviving cells in the [salivary gland](#) as a strategy to repair the damage from radiation, says Ovitt, an associate professor of Biomedical Genetics and in the Center for Oral Biology at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

This is good news for the nearly 65,000 people who develop head and [neck cancer](#) in the U.S. each year. Most of them suffer from debilitating [dry mouth](#) (known as xerostomia) due to permanent loss of the cells that produce saliva, resulting in tooth decay, oral infections, and impaired taste and speech. Read Ovitt's full scientific study published in the journal *Cell Reports*.

More information: Pei-Lun Weng et al. Limited Regeneration of Adult Salivary Glands after Severe Injury Involves Cellular Plasticity, *Cell Reports* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.celrep.2018.07.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.celrep.2018.07.016)

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