Controlling Excess Saliva and Runny Nose

Excess saliva production (sialorrhea) is a very common problem in ALS patients. The disease does not cause the overproduction of saliva, like people often think, but instead weakens the throat muscles needed for regular swallowing. When not properly managed, sialorrhea can result in drooling, choking, or difficulty speaking. Not only is it difficult to control, but it is also embarrassing and causes those suffering with this issue to stay home and feel isolated from their world. Isolation feeds depression and the downward spiral continues for a symptom that is treatable.

Managing excess saliva can be accomplished both holistically and through medication. Initially, we suggest drinking two glasses of tomato juice daily, if possible. Tomatoes contain high concentrations of lycopene, which is a natural reducer of salivary output. If stomach distress occurs, add a tablespoon of sugar to each glass to dilute the acid. Packing sea salt on the tongue, or sucking on olives or lemons has been known to provide some relief.

If more aggressive treatments are needed, consider medications like amitriptyline, Nortriptyline, Atropine Sulfate (formerly known as Sal-tropine), and Scopolamine all can help control excess saliva. Our preference is for Atropine Sulfate, formerly known as Sal-tropine which requires a prescription but seems to be the most effective for many.

Equally as important as our recommendations for controlling excess saliva are the things we do NOT recommend. We do not suggest the use of beta-blocker/SSRI or tricyclic prescriptions (such as amitriptyline) unless absolutely necessary, and we never endorse the use of salivary gland Botox injections due to countless reports of adverse side effects. The risks associated with Botox simply outweigh any benefits, and we do not support treatments that may put patients in danger.

If all of the above or our other suggestions fail to control excess saliva, a reason may be the length of time that you or your loved one has had the disease. Those who have had ALS/MND for more than 5-7 years may be unable to benefit from these recommendations, due to the dysfunctional musculature in the throat. If so, your only support may be the use of a suction machine.
Controlling a Runny Nose

To treat a runny nose, keep the air moist through the use of an electrical humidifier or vaporizer. Saline nasal sprays can also be of aid by shrinking the swollen tissues that produce mucus. Simply Saline is one option. Try a natural herbal tea of 1 cup of water boiled together for five minutes with 1 tsp. each of elderberry, fresh mint, yarrow root and cayenne pepper. Strain herbs, allow tea to cool, then drink. Keep your handkerchief handy, because this tea will make your nose run even more at first, but your symptoms will soon dry up. Andrographis is a natural homeopathic treatment that is often called “Indian Echinacea,” as it shares many of the same curative properties. Readily available in natural food stores, a dosage of 400 mg three times a day before meals can help dry a runny nose. Chewing raw ginger and swallowing the juice warms the body, increases circulation and helps drain the nose.