

ORAL THRUSH

Oral thrush is a fungal infection inside your mouth. It's common in babies and in older people with dentures. Usually, white patches appear on your tongue, but they may be on the inside of your cheeks, on your gums, tonsils, or on the roof of your mouth. If you wipe off a patch, you will see a red area underneath. Sometimes you may have no white spots and only red areas in your mouth.

Your mouth may be sore, both inside and at the corners of your mouth. It may be difficult to eat and drink. You may lose your sense of taste, or have a bad taste in your mouth. Babies with oral thrush may not want to feed or may also have nappy rash.

Oral thrush is caused by *Candida* (a yeast) that usually lives in your mouth and digestive system without causing problems. But if the numbers of *Candida* in your mouth start increasing, you may get oral thrush.

You are more likely to get oral thrush if you:

- take antibiotics
- use too much antibacterial mouthwash
- take inhaled or oral steroids
- wear false teeth (dentures), particularly if they don't fit properly
- don't clean your teeth often enough
- have a dry mouth (either because of a medical condition or a medicine you're taking)
- smoke
- are having treatment for cancer or have a weakened immune system
- are frail, generally ill, have diabetes or your body lacks iron, folate or vitamin B12.

How can I treat oral thrush?

Use an antifungal medicine such as **miconazole oral gel** or **nystatin liquid**. If you are taking a medicine such as warfarin to thin your blood then use nystatin liquid. Ask your pharmacist which treatment would be best for you. To give miconazole oral gel and nystatin liquid time to work, don't eat or drink for about 30 minutes after using them. In babies, give the gel or liquid after a feed or drink.

Miconazole oral gel

Give infants aged from 4 months to 24 months 1.25ml (one-quarter of a 5ml measuring spoon) of the miconazole oral gel. Use 2.5ml (one-half of a 5ml measuring spoon) for adults and children aged 2 years and older.

- Using a clean finger, spread miconazole oral gel on the patches of oral thrush.
- For babies and young children only put a little on at a time and avoid the backs of their mouths so that they don't choke.
- Don't swallow the gel immediately; try to keep it in your mouth for as long as possible.
- Use the miconazole oral gel 4 times a day after meals.
- Keep using the miconazole oral gel for at least a week after the patches and redness have gone, to stop the infection coming back.

Nystatin liquid

If miconazole oral gel is not suitable for you, you may be able to use nystatin liquid. Children aged 4 weeks and older can have nystatin liquid.

- You will be given a dropper to help you put nystatin liquid on the patches of oral thrush.
- Shake the bottle and squeeze up 1ml of nystatin liquid into the dropper and put this on to the patches.
- Try to keep the nystatin liquid in your mouth for as long as possible.
- Use the nystatin liquid 4 times a day and keep using it for 48 hours after the patches and redness have gone, to stop the infection coming back.

What else can help?

To help stop oral thrush from coming back:

- rinse your mouth out after eating.
- brush your teeth 2 times a day with fluoride toothpaste, and floss in between your teeth.
- take out your false teeth at night, clean them, soak them in an appropriate solution, rinse them and let them dry in the air. Brush your gums, tongue and the inside of your mouth with a soft toothbrush.
- see your dentist if your false teeth don't fit well.
- stop smoking.
- make sure any underlying conditions you may have, such as diabetes, are well controlled.
- use a spacer device if you use a steroid inhaler, and rinse out your mouth with water after using it. If your child uses a steroid inhaler and is too young to rinse out their mouth, clean their teeth instead. If you are unsure how to correctly use your inhaler or spacer device ask your pharmacist, practice nurse or doctor to advise you.
- take regular sips of water if you are taking a medicine that gives you a dry mouth.

Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor, or dentist, if:

- you've used oral thrush treatment but you are not better after 7 days.
- swallowing hurts or you have difficulty swallowing.
- you have a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy or other medicines or conditions.
- you have only one red, or red and white, patch in your mouth, and it won't rub off. See your dentist urgently.
- you have diabetes but you don't have good control of your blood sugar and you haven't seen your doctor in the last 3 months.

Can I give oral thrush to other people?

No, you can't usually give oral thrush to other people, but babies can.

A baby with oral thrush who is breastfeeding can give nipple thrush to their mother. See your doctor if your baby has oral thrush and your nipples change colour, crack or if breastfeeding is painful for you.

If your baby has oral thrush, the infection can pass through their system and spread to other people. Wash your hands after changing their nappies.

Where can I find further information?

Patient UK: www.patient.info

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.