

# Thrush

## What is thrush?

Thrush is a yeast infection of the mouth. Another name for thrush is candidiasis.

## What is the cause?

The yeast that causes thrush is a type of fungus called candida. This yeast is present everywhere in the environment, including the surface of our bodies and in our mouths. It usually does not cause a problem because normal bacteria keep it from growing out of control. When the level of bacteria drops, the yeast can grow beyond their usual numbers. Bacteria levels can be lowered by:

- Taking antibiotics
- Having medical conditions that affect your immune system (for example, diabetes or cancer)
- Having other infections, such as HIV/AIDS
- Taking steroid medicines or birth control pills for a long period of time

## What are the symptoms?

Thrush can usually be seen as white patches in the mouth and on the tongue. These areas may or may not be sore. Sometimes the white patches of fungus get rubbed or scraped off, leaving red areas that are tender. Sometimes the corners of the mouth get sore and red. The infected areas may sting or burn when hot or acidic foods are eaten. If the thrush is severe, it may be hard to eat and swallow.

In severe cases, thrush may spread down into the esophagus, the food pipe that leads to your stomach. If this happens, you may have pain, trouble swallowing, or a feeling that food is stuck in your throat or chest.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will look at your tongue and inside your mouth. The diagnosis is usually made from the physical exam. If there is any question, your provider may gently scrape off a sample of the white patch so it can be examined under a microscope.

## How is it treated?

Thrush often flares up and then goes away on its own. Mild cases can be treated by gently removing the white patches from the mouth with a cotton swab. This removes the yeast and allows the "good" bacteria to grow. Then you can have a normal balance of bacteria and fungus again.

Your provider may prescribe an antifungal medicine. The medicine may be taken as a liquid, which is swished around the mouth and swallowed, or as a pill.

If you are breast-feeding an infant who has oral thrush, often you both need to be treated. Otherwise, you may pass the infection back and forth. Your healthcare provider may prescribe a medicine for your baby and a cream for your breasts. Normally, breast-feeding can continue, but keep sucking time to no more than 20 minutes per feeding. This will help you avoid hurting your nipples and having breast-feeding problems because your nipples hurt.

If you get thrush often because of another chronic condition, your provider may prescribe daily medicine to keep it from coming back.

## **How long will the effects last?**

In most cases you will feel better 2 to 3 days after you start using the medicine, but you may still be able to see some redness or have some tenderness in your mouth. It is very important to take all the medicine as prescribed, even after the infection seems to be gone.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking your medicine.
- If your mouth is sore, drink cool liquids and eat soft, bland foods until the tenderness is gone.
- If you get thrush when taking antibiotics, try eating unsweetened yogurt or taking acidophilus capsules to help restore the natural balance of bacteria. Acidophilus is available in natural food stores and drugstores.
- Let your provider know if your symptoms are not getting better.

## **What can I do to prevent thrush?**

To prevent thrush, keep these tips in mind:

- Practice careful hand washing.
- When a child has thrush, tell people who care for the child. They should be extra careful about washing their hands after caring for the child.
- Sterilize all bottles, nipples, pacifiers, and teething toys by boiling for 5 minutes. Boil everything again once the thrush is gone.
- Eat yogurt or take acidophilus capsules when you are taking antibiotics.
- If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar under control.

In adults thrush often happens because of another medical problem. Be sure to ask your healthcare provider if there is another medicine or treatment plan that would decrease your risk of getting thrush.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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