

Oral Thrush



Oral thrush — also called oral candidiasis — is a condition in which the fungus *Candida albicans* accumulates on the lining of your mouth.

Candida is a normal organism in your mouth, but sometimes it can overgrow and cause symptoms.

Oral thrush causes creamy white lesions, usually on your tongue or inner cheeks.

Sometimes oral thrush may spread to the roof of your mouth, your gums or tonsils, or the back of your throat.

Although oral thrush can affect anyone, it's more likely to occur in babies, the elderly, and in people with suppressed immune systems or certain health conditions, or those who take certain medications.

Oral thrush is a minor problem if you're healthy, but if you have a weakened immune system, symptoms of oral thrush may be more severe and difficult to control.

Symptoms

- Creamy white lesions on your tongue, inner cheeks, and sometimes on the roof of your mouth, gums and tonsils
- Slightly raised lesions with a cottage cheese-like appearance
- Redness or soreness that may be severe enough to cause difficulty eating or swallowing
- Slight bleeding if the lesions are rubbed or scraped
- Cracking and redness at the corners of your mouth (especially in denture wearers)
- A cottony feeling in your mouth
- Loss of taste

In severe cases, the lesions may spread downward into your esophagus . If this occurs, you may experience difficulty swallowing or feel as if food is getting stuck in your throat.

Causes

Oral thrush and other candida infections can occur when your immune system is weakened by disease or by drugs such as prednisone, or when antibiotics disturb the natural balance of microorganisms in your body.

These diseases and conditions may make you more susceptible to oral thrush infection:

- HIV/AIDS.
- Cancer.
- Diabetes mellitus.

Risk factors

Anyone can develop oral thrush, but the infection is more common in certain people. Risk factors include:

- Being an infant or elderly
- Having a weakened immune system
- Wearing dentures
- Having other health conditions, such as diabetes
- Taking certain medications, such as antibiotics or oral or inhaled corticosteroids
- Undergoing chemotherapy or radiation treatment for cancer

Having conditions that cause dry mouth

Tests and diagnosis

Oral thrush can usually be diagnosed simply by looking at the lesions, but sometimes a small sample is examined under a microscope to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

- **Healthy adults and children.** Your doctor may recommend antifungal medication. This comes in several forms, including lozenges, tablets, or a liquid that you swish in your mouth and then swallow.
- **Infants and nursing mothers.** If you're breast-feeding and your infant has oral thrush, you and your baby could pass the infection back and forth. Your doctor may prescribe a mild antifungal medication for your baby and an antifungal cream for your breasts. Ask your doctor about the best way to clean your breast nipples, bottle nipples, pacifiers and any detachable parts of a breast pump if you use one.
- **Adults with weakened immune systems.** Most often your doctor will recommend antifungal medication. But *Candida albicans* can become resistant to many antifungal medications, especially in people with late-stage

HIV infection. So a drug called amphotericin B may be used, but only when other drugs aren't effective, as it can cause serious side effects.