



Oral Thrush

Understanding Oral Candidiasis and Maintaining a Healthy Mouth

What Is Oral Thrush?

Oral thrush, also known as **oral candidiasis**, is a fungal infection of the mouth caused by an overgrowth of **Candida**, a type of yeast that normally lives in small amounts in the mouth.

Under certain conditions, *Candida* can multiply excessively and cause infection.

Oral thrush is common in infants, older adults, people who wear dentures, and individuals with weakened immune systems. Most cases respond well to appropriate treatment.

What Causes Oral Thrush?

Candida is normally present in the mouth without causing problems.

Thrush develops when the balance of microorganisms is disrupted, allowing the fungus to grow excessively.

Common risk factors include:

- Wearing dentures
- Poorly fitting dentures
- Poor denture hygiene
- Dry mouth
- Diabetes
- Recent antibiotic use
- Inhaled corticosteroid medications
- Smoking
- Cancer treatment
- Weakened immune system

Not everyone with these risk factors develops oral thrush.

Common Symptoms

Oral thrush may cause:

- White or cream-colored patches inside the mouth
- Redness beneath the patches
- A burning sensation
- Soreness
- Loss or change of taste
- Cracking at the corners of the mouth (angular cheilitis)
- Pain while eating or swallowing in more severe cases

Some people have very mild symptoms, while others experience significant discomfort.

Where Does Oral Thrush Occur?

White patches may develop on the:

- Tongue
- Inside of the cheeks
- Roof of the mouth
- Gums
- Tonsils
- Back of the throat

When gently wiped, the patches may leave a red or slightly bleeding surface underneath.

Who Is Most at Risk?

Oral thrush is more likely to occur in:

Infants

Because their immune systems are still developing, infants commonly experience oral thrush during the first months of life.

Older Adults

Older adults may be at increased risk due to:

- Denture use
 - Reduced saliva production
 - Certain medications
 - Chronic medical conditions
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People with Diabetes

Poorly controlled blood sugar can promote fungal growth and increase the likelihood of recurrent infections.

People Using Inhaled Corticosteroids

Asthma and COPD inhalers containing corticosteroids may increase the risk of oral thrush.

Rinsing the mouth with water after each use helps reduce this risk.

How Is Oral Thrush Diagnosed?

Most cases are diagnosed through:

- Medical history
- Clinical examination

Additional laboratory testing is usually unnecessary but may be recommended in persistent or recurrent cases.

How Is Oral Thrush Treated?

Treatment focuses on eliminating the fungal infection and correcting underlying risk factors whenever possible.

Your healthcare provider may prescribe:

- Antifungal mouth rinses

- Antifungal lozenges
- Antifungal tablets
- Antifungal oral suspensions

Treatment duration depends on the severity of the infection.

Denture Care

People who wear dentures should:

- Remove dentures at night unless otherwise instructed.
- Clean dentures every day.
- Soak dentures in an appropriate denture-cleaning solution.
- Brush the gums and tongue daily.

Proper denture hygiene helps reduce the risk of recurrent infections.

Can Oral Thrush Be Prevented?

You can reduce your risk by:

- Brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.
 - Cleaning between your teeth every day.
 - Cleaning dentures properly.
 - Removing dentures overnight.
 - Drinking plenty of water.
 - Managing diabetes.
 - Rinsing your mouth after using inhaled corticosteroids.
 - Visiting your dentist regularly.
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When Should You See a Dentist or Physician?

Seek professional evaluation if:

- White patches do not improve within **one to two weeks**.

- You have pain when swallowing.
- The infection repeatedly returns.
- You have a weakened immune system.
- Your dentures become uncomfortable because of sore tissues.

Persistent oral thrush may indicate an underlying medical condition that requires evaluation.

Is Oral Thrush Contagious?

Oral thrush is **not generally considered highly contagious** among healthy individuals.

However, Candida can occasionally spread between:

- Mothers and infants during breastfeeding
- Individuals with weakened immune systems

Good hygiene helps reduce transmission.

Common Myths

"Oral thrush only affects babies."

False.

Although common in infants, oral thrush can occur at any age.

"Poor oral hygiene is the only cause."

False.

Many medical conditions, medications, and immune system changes may contribute.

"Thrush always goes away without treatment."

False.

Some mild cases improve on their own, but many require antifungal medication, particularly in individuals with underlying risk factors.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Oral thrush is a fungal infection caused by an overgrowth of *Candida*.
 - ✓ White patches, soreness, and burning are common symptoms.
 - ✓ Denture wear, diabetes, dry mouth, antibiotics, and inhaled corticosteroids increase risk.
 - ✓ Most cases respond well to antifungal treatment.
 - ✓ Good oral hygiene and proper denture care help prevent recurrence.
 - ✓ Persistent or recurrent oral thrush should be evaluated by a healthcare professional.
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References

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