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Sore or white tongue

A sore or white tongue is not usually serious and is often easily treated.

Things you can do yourself

Do

- ✓ use a soft toothbrush to brush your teeth
- ✓ brush your tongue or use a scraper to help improve a white tongue
- ✓ use a straw to drink cool drinks
- ✓ take paracetamol or ibuprofen

Don't

- ✗ do not use a toothpaste that contains sodium lauryl sulphate
- ✗ do not eat hard, spicy, salty, acidic or hot food and drink that may irritate your tongue
- ✗ do not smoke
- ✗ do not drink alcohol

You can ask a pharmacist about:

- what's causing your sore or white tongue
- if you can buy anything to help with any pain or irritation
- if you should see a dentist or GP

Contact your GP or dentist if you:

- have pain or itchiness that does not go away or gets worse
- have white patches on your tongue

Common causes of a sore or white tongue

Biting or burning your tongue with hot food or drink can cause pain and swelling. This should only last a few days.

A white tongue can be a sign of a health condition.

Do not self-diagnose. Contact your GP if you're worried.

Lichen planus



White patches on the tongue and inside the cheek, with sore gums

Leukoplakia



White, raised patches on the tongue, inside of the cheeks, or on the gums, that do not come off when you rub them

Geographic tongue



Blotchy, red patches on the tongue that have a white or light-coloured border

Mouth ulcer



Round, painful and swollen sores that look like blisters and can appear on the tongue, inside of the cheeks, or on the lips

Read about [mouth ulcers](#).

Oral thrush



Itchy, red mouth with white patches on the tongue

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