

Oral thrush (mouth thrush)

Thrush is a fungal infection caused by a yeast called candida. Oral thrush means that the infection is in the mouth.

Oral thrush is common in babies and in older people with dentures. Most of the time oral thrush can be treated with over-the-counter medicines from a pharmacy.

Check if it's oral thrush

Adults and children over 12 months

Signs of oral thrush include:

- white patches or spots in your mouth that cannot be rubbed off
- spots that join together to form larger patches - these can become yellow
- if you wipe off a white spot, it leaves a red patch that can bleed
- red or sore area under your dentures
- red and sore mouth without white spots - especially after taking antibiotics or steroids
- food tasting different to the way it usually does

► [What oral thrush looks like in adults](#)

You might have other symptoms if you're an adult, including:

- cracks at the corners of your mouth
- an unpleasant taste in your mouth
- pain inside your mouth - for example, a sore tongue or sore gums
- difficulty eating and drinking

Babies under 12 months

Not all babies with oral thrush will have symptoms.

Signs of oral thrush in babies include:

- a white coating on your baby's tongue that cannot be rubbed off - it can look like milk but a milk

coating will come off easily

- white spots in your baby's mouth
- not wanting to feed
- nappy rash
- dribbling more than usual if it is sore for them to swallow saliva

If you breastfeed your baby when they have oral thrush, you can get a thrush infection of your nipple or areola (the circle around your nipple). This is called [nipple thrush](#).

► [What oral thrush looks like in babies](#)

See your GP if:

- your baby is under 4 months and has signs of oral thrush
- you do not see any improvement after 1 week of treatment with a mouth gel
- you have oral thrush and you have difficulty or pain swallowing
- you are not sure if it is oral thrush or not

When it's not oral thrush

If you are not sure if you have thrush or you do not get better after 2 weeks, see your GP. You may need stronger treatment.

There are other conditions that can cause [sore or white tongue](#). Some of these can be serious if not treated.

Treating oral thrush in babies and children

Contact your GP if you think your baby has oral thrush.

Your GP can treat your baby for oral thrush with any of the following:

- a liquid antifungal medicine - to get rid of the fungus in your baby's mouth
- an antifungal cream - if there is a rash in your baby's nappy area
- further treatment or another antifungal medicine - if the infection does not clear after 7 days

Speak to your GP if you are breastfeeding. They can prescribe cream to treat or prevent you from getting [nipple thrush](#).

Helping your child's oral thrush at home

You can help your child's oral thrush to heal by:

- offering regular milk feeds - you may need to offer more if they are not taking as much as usual
- feeding them bland foods - spicy or acidic foods could sting their mouth
- keeping their hands clean so that the infection does not spread
- sterilising any soothers or dummies regularly, as well as any toys they put in their mouth, such as teething rings
- [sterilising any bottles and other feeding equipment](#) regularly, especially the teats
- washing your hands after [changing nappies](#) and before any feeds

Treating oral thrush in adults

Adults can treat oral thrush at home with a mouth gel from a pharmacy. Your pharmacist will tell you how to use the gel.

Treatment usually lasts at least 7 days. Always follow the packet instructions. Keep all medicines out of sight and reach of children.

Oral thrush in adults is not contagious, but you should treat it as soon as possible. The infection can spread to other parts of the body if it's not treated.

See your GP if you do not see any improvement after 1 week of treatment with a mouth gel.

Other risk factors for oral thrush

You might get thrush if you're:

- taking a course or more of antibiotics
- taking [steroid inhalers](#) for conditions such as asthma or COPD
- taking medicine that affects your immune system, such as chemotherapy
- diagnosed with a condition that weakens your immune system, such as certain types of cancer, or HIV or AIDS

Preventing oral thrush

There are some things you can do to help prevent oral thrush:

Do

- ✓ brush your teeth twice a day
- ✓ clean your dentures - read about denture care on the Dental Health Foundation website
- ✓ go for regular dental check-ups, even if you have dentures
- ✓ brush your gums and tongue with a soft toothbrush if you do not have any teeth

- ✓ rinse your mouth after eating or taking medicine
- ✓ rinse your mouth after using steroid inhalers - your GP or practice nurse can review your inhaler technique with you
- ✓ go to regular check-ups if you have a long-term condition such as diabetes

Don't

- ✗ do not wear your dentures overnight
- ✗ do not wear dentures that do not fit you properly
- ✗ do not smoke - [get help to stop smoking and sign up for a Quit plan](#)

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