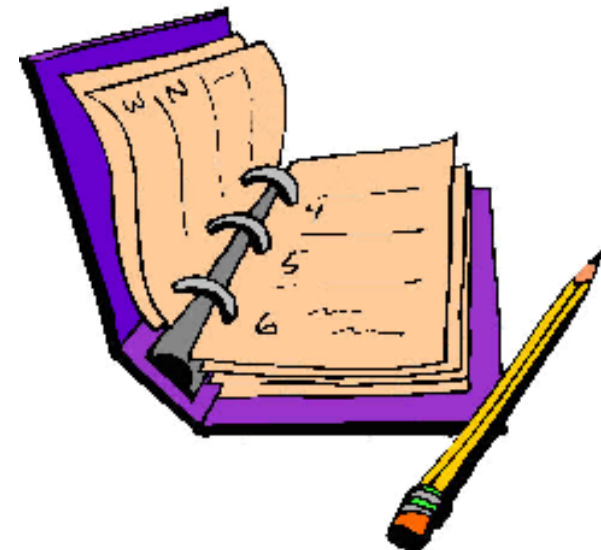


Patient Information Booklet

Oral thrush



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Oral thrush

Introduction

Oral thrush (oral candidiasis) is caused by a fungus called candida that causes an infection in the mouth. It is not a type of infection that can be passed on to other. Everybody has some thrush in their mouths, even babies.

It is also possible to get thrush in other parts of the body, such as the vagina, nappy area or nail folds.

Oral thrush most commonly affects people who wear dentures. People who have difficulties keeping their mouth clean, people with diabetes and those who take steroids are also at a higher risk of developing the condition. Thrush is very common in hospice patients as their immune system is weak and the mouth is dry. Some antibiotics may cause thrush and many people find that taking certain antibiotics encourages the infection to recur, especially if taken over a long period of time.



A dry mouth caused by certain drugs such as morphine, or after chemotherapy or radiotherapy to the head and neck may also lead to thrush.

Symptoms

If you wear dentures, when your denture is taken out, your dentist may be able to see a very red area under the denture.

In patients without dentures, white spots on the mouth and tongue are typical. These may join together to form larger spots or plaques. When wiped off the underlying tissue may be red and raw.

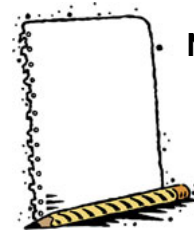
After antibiotics or steroids it is more common for the affected areas just to appear red and sore. There may also be red sore areas at the corner of the lips known as angular cheilitis or angular stomatitis. Many mild oral thrush infections are painless, although the condition can sometimes become quite sore. Severe thrush can spread to the throat and cause pain and difficulty swallowing.

Causes

Thrush infections are caused by an increase in the levels of fungus/yeast naturally present in the mouth.

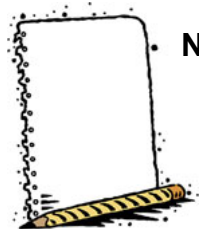
Yeasts may grow and causes symptoms if -

- * The immune system is weakened (immuno-deficiency)
- * The healthy bacteria normally found in the mouth are killed
- * Very little saliva is produced, or
- * The acidity of the mouth changes



Notes

Notes



Diagnosis

In most cases thrush can easily be diagnosed simply by looking at the spots. Occasionally, a sample may need to be scraped off and sent to the laboratory for analysis. Your hospice sister or doctor will diagnose whether you have thrush. If there are known causes, for example you are taking antibiotics or having difficulty with dentures, these should be investigated and treated first.

Treatment

Oral hygiene

It is important to keep your mouth as clean as possible and rinse after meals. Smoking encourages growth of further yeast infections, as does keeping dentures in the mouth for 24 hours at a time.



Mouth wash

A regular mouthwash will be prescribed. Mouthwash should be used preferably 4 hourly but at least after each meal.

Denture hygiene

This is extremely important for denture wearers who develop oral thrush, as the yeast clings to the fitting surface of the denture. Dentures should be kept out as much as possible, especially overnight. Some yeast infections will resolve completely if the dentures are not worn at night for two weeks. Dentures should be cleaned in warm soapy water and scrubbed with a soft nailbrush on the fitting surface (the non-polished side). The dentures can be soaked in any solution used to sterilize baby bottles. If your denture has metal components, use a chlorhexidine solution once a week. Do not use bleach on dentures with metal components.

Medication

If careful cleaning and hygiene and mouthwashes have not helped you may be prescribed medicated tablets, gel, drops or lozenges, which should be sucked slowly.

Prevention

It may be possible to alter one or more of the causes to help prevent further bouts of oral thrush. For example -

- * If you have diabetes, good control of your blood sugar level reduces the risk of thrush and other infections.
- * If you use steroid inhalers, use of a spacer device may reduce the risk of thrush. You should also gargle and rinse your mouth after using your inhaler.
- * If you are a denture wearer, keeping the dentures very clean and removing them at night will help to prevent infections.
- * If you have dry mouth as a result of taking drugs, take frequent sips of water to keep the mouth moist.

