

## Candida or Thrush Infections

If a white soft creamy deposit develops on the tongue and cheeks it could signal the development of a Thrush or Candida infection. It can also appear on the roof of the mouth, gums, tonsils, or the back of the throat. These lesions, which may have a "cottage cheese" appearance, can be painful and may bleed slightly when scraped or brushed off. In severe cases, the lesions may spread into the esophagus, or swallowing tube, causing difficulty during swallowing and pain, fever and a feeling of something stuck in the throat area. Young infants and the elderly are frequently affected. Patients who wear dentures or partials may also be affected and the tissues under the partials or dentures take on a bright red color with a velvety to pebbly surface texture. Another form of candida or thrush is called angular cheilitis which affects the corners of the lips. The corners of the lips become painful, fissured, eroded and encrusted.

Candida or thrush infections are very common since a small amount of the Candida fungus is present in the mouth, digestive tract, and skin of most healthy people and are normally kept in check by other bacteria and microorganisms in the body. However, when we experience stress, illnesses, or take certain medications we can disturb the delicate balance, allowing the Candida fungus to grow out of control causing an infection. Candida infection is not limited to the mouth. It can cause causing diaper rash in infants or vaginal yeast infections in women.

Medications which affect the immune system, such as corticosteroids, or antibiotics which destroy bacterial cells can upset the balance of microorganisms in the mouth and may cause candida infections or thrush. Illnesses that make Candida infection more likely to develop include uncontrolled diabetes, HIV infection, cancer, and dry mouth. Pregnancy causes hormonal changes which can cause candida infections. In addition, babies can pass the infection to their mothers during breast-feeding. People who smoke or wear dentures that don't fit properly also are at increased risk for candida infections. Individuals who sleep with their dentures nightly are at increased risk.

The lactobacilli are part of the "good" bacteria that can help eliminate the yeast or candida fungus in the mouth. Adding yogurt with lactobacilli to the daily diet could help decrease the recurrence of Candida in healthy individuals. Other ways to decrease recurrence are daily good oral hygiene such as flossing nightly and brushing your teeth and tongue twice daily. It is important to treat all carious lesions (decayed teeth) and if you have been diagnosed with gums disease work together with your dentist to control it in order to create a healthy bacterial oral environment.

A dentist can diagnose candida infections or thrush by examining your mouth. Symptoms include the distinctive white lesions on your mouth, tongue, or cheeks. Lightly brushing the lesions away reveals a reddened, tender area that may bleed slightly.

While healthy children and adults can be effectively treated for thrush, the symptoms may be more severe and difficult to manage in those with weakened immune systems. Antifungal medications, which are generally taken for 10 to 14 days, are often prescribed to treat thrush. These medicines are available in tablets, lozenges, or liquids. Your dentist will have a specific treatment approach designed for you based on your age and the cause of the infection. Because the presence of Candida infection can be a symptom of other medical problems, your dentist may suggest you seek care from a medical doctor as well so that any underlying health problems you may have can be treated.

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