

Thrush

(Candidiasis)

Thrush is a common infection caused by a fungus called 'candida'. Candida is one of the many micro-organisms that normally live harmlessly in and on our bodies. Under certain conditions, candida can flourish and cause thrush. Thrush can be treated with antifungal medicines available from a pharmacist.

Common sites for thrush infection are the mouth, vagina and warm, moist areas of skin.

Oral thrush

Symptoms

- Creamy white patches in the mouth. The patches may be red and raw underneath the white coating.
- Red and painful areas in mouth.
- Sore red splits at each side of the mouth.
- Dry mouth, taste changes.

Treatment

- Antifungal medicines for oral thrush are available as liquids, gels and lozenges.

- Liquids and gels must be rinsed well around the mouth for as long as possible before swallowing. Lozenges must be sucked.
- Antifungal medicine should be used after eating, as food can decrease its effect.
- People who wear dentures should apply antifungal liquid or gel to cleaned dentures before use.
- Babies often have thrush nappy rash at the same time as oral thrush – this will also need treatment.
- If a breast feeding baby has oral thrush, the mother may have or get thrush on her nipples – this will also need treatment.

Self Care

- Brush teeth at least twice a day and floss teeth at least once a day. Replace toothbrush after having oral thrush.
- Clean dentures well with a brush and leave them out overnight.
- Rinse mouth out with water after using an asthma 'preventer' inhaler.
- Don't smoke.
- Regularly sterilise babies' dummies, mouth toys and feeding equipment.

Vaginal thrush

Symptoms

- Itching, burning and soreness in and around the vagina.
- Redness and swelling in and around the vagina.
- Burning around the vagina when passing urine.
- A white, usually thick vaginal discharge, with little or no smell.
- Pain during intercourse.

Treatment

Thrush in and around the vagina can be treated with:

- One oral (swallowed) capsule of antifungal medicine – avoid if pregnant or breastfeeding
- Antifungal cream or pessaries inserted into the vagina
- Antifungal cream applied around the outside of the vagina.

Combination products containing either an oral capsule or vaginal pessary,

together with a cream for use around the outside of the vagina, are available.

If inserting pessaries or cream into the vagina:

- Use at night
- Use pantyliners to stop leaks onto underwear
- Continue using treatments even during a menstrual period
- Avoid using condoms, diaphragms and cervical caps during and for three days after finishing treatment. These contraceptives may be damaged by antifungal medicines
- Pregnant women need to be careful if using a vaginal applicator. It may be safest to use pessaries inserted with a clean finger.

Self Care

- Wear loose fitting cotton underwear.
- Dry the genital area well after showers, baths, swimming.
- After going to the toilet, wipe from front to back using a clean piece of toilet paper each time.
- Blot rather than wipe with toilet paper when the vagina is sore.
- Resist sexual intercourse while affected by vaginal thrush.
- Avoid using antiseptics, douches or perfumed sprays in the genital area. Soap, laundry detergents and fabric softeners may also irritate the area.

Note: Vaginal thrush is not a sexually transmitted infection.

Thrush on the skin

Symptoms

- Occurs especially in areas that are warm, moist or irritated (e.g., nappy area, armpits, under breasts, groin and on nipples of breastfeeding mothers).
- Appears as a moist, shiny, red rash, sometimes with blisters or scaly areas. Skin between fingers and toes may appear moist, white and peeling.
- May be burning, sore and itchy.

Treatment

Antifungal medicines for the skin are available as creams, powders, lotions and gels. Some treatments need to be continued for 2 weeks after the rash has cleared. Ask a pharmacist for advice.

Self Care

- Wear loose clothing made of natural fibres, such as cotton.
- Keep skin as clean and dry as possible. Dry well after showers, baths, swimming.
- Use a barrier cream or a drying powder to reduce wetness and irritation. Ask a pharmacist.

Triggers

Some things put people more at risk of thrush, including:

- Diabetes – repeated thrush may be a sign of diabetes
- Poor general health, stress
- Poor diet (e.g., iron deficiency)
- Being overweight

Important

Consult a doctor if you have symptoms of thrush and:

- This is the first time you have had the symptoms
- Symptoms have not improved with treatment
- Symptoms return within 2 months after treatment
- You have had more than 3 thrush infections in a year
- The discharge from your vagina is frothy, coloured or has a strong smell
- You have unusual bleeding from your vagina
- You are, or could be, pregnant
- You are under 16 or over 60 years of age
- You also have pain, fever or are feeling unwell
- You also have cancer
- You or your partner have had a sexually transmitted infection

- Medicines and medical conditions that weaken the immune system (e.g., chemotherapy, AIDS)
- Hormone changes (e.g., pregnancy, contraceptive pill, hormone replacement therapy)
- Antibiotic treatment
- Corticosteroid medicines, including inhaled asthma 'preventer' medicines
- Wearing dentures
- Dry mouth
- Wearing pantyhose, tight-fitting pants or underwear that is not pure cotton
- Wiping the wrong way after using the toilet, which can spread candida from the bowel to the vagina
- Nappies and feminine hygiene products.

For more information

A doctor

Listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

A dentist

Listed under 'Dentists' in the yellow pages of the telephone book.

DermNet NZ

Website: www.dermnetnz.org

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.***

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: