

Oral Candidiasis (“Thrush”)

What is oral candidiasis (“thrush”)

Oral candidiasis, or “thrush,” is a fungal infection of the mouth and/or throat. Although this condition sometimes occurs without symptoms, the most common symptoms of thrush include burning of the mouth and throat, an altered sense of taste, creamy white or yellowish spots on the mouth that can be removed by light scraping and mouth sores.

What causes thrush?

Thrush is caused by a fungus called **Candida**. Everyone has a small amount of this fungus in the mouth, vagina, digestive tract and skin; however, in healthy persons, “friendly” bacteria and the immune system keep **Candida** from causing infection. A damaged or weakened immune system, such as in HIV disease, makes it easier for **Candida** to grow and cause infection. Other factors that may stimulate the growth of **Candida** include diabetes, pregnancy, vitamin/mineral deficiency and the extended use of antibiotics, steroids or oral contraceptives.

Can thrush be treated?

Absolutely. Typically, your doctor will first use a topical treatment such as a mouth rinse or lozenge containing an anti-fungal medication. Common topical medications include clotrimazole and nystatin. If you have esophageal candidiasis (thrush in the tube leading from your throat to your stomach), recurring candidiasis or have a serious outbreak that does not clear up after topical treatment, your doctor may recommend a systemic treatment (one that works throughout your body).

Is there anything I can eat to get rid of thrush?

While you have thrush, you will want to avoid any foods that make the pain worse. You may want to avoid spicy, acidic or hot foods as well as cigarettes, alcohol and carbonated drinks. During a thrush outbreak, try to eat soft, cool and bland foods (like applesauce, oatmeal, mashed beans, etc.). In addition to taking medications as recommended by your doctor, some dietary changes may help to treat and prevent thrush:

- Decrease or avoid sugars (**Candida** thrives when it comes into contact with sugar)
- Decrease or avoid alcohol (alcohol converts to sugar, which can allow **Candida** to thrive)
- Drink milk containing acidophilus bacteria (a “friendly” bacteria that may help fight **Candida**)
- Eat yogurt containing live cultures

Can I prevent thrush?

As CD4+ cell counts decline, thrush becomes more common. The most important method of prevention for thrush is to strengthen the immune system and raise the CD4+ cell count. Your doctor may also recommend preventive anti-fungal treatment. Other things you can do to prevent thrush include:

- Stop smoking
- Practice good oral hygiene (brush and floss daily, see a dentist regularly)
- Avoid excess alcohol and sugars

For more information about thrush, try the following websites:

HIVdent.org (www.HIVdent.org)

The Body: An AIDS and HIV Information Resource (www.thebody.com)