

## Paediatric department

# Oral thrush in babies

## What is oral thrush?

Oral thrush in babies is a fungal infection in the mouth. It is usually harmless and easily treatable.

About 1 in every 7 babies develop oral thrush at some point. It is more common in babies younger than 10 weeks, but older babies can also get it.

Oral thrush is not usually due to poor hygiene and it does not usually mean that your baby is ill in any other way. Some babies have recurring episodes of oral thrush.

## What causes it?

Oral thrush in the mouth is caused by a yeast germ called Candida. Healthy people have this in their mouth and it doesn't normally cause a problem. However, with babies there can be an overgrowth of Candida in the mouth because their immune systems are less developed to resist infection. It can also affect babies if they have been recently treated with antibiotics.

If you have been breastfeeding and have recently had antibiotics, then your own healthy bacteria can be affected making you more at risk of thrush infection. This infection can then be passed on to your baby during breastfeeding.

## What are the signs?

- Creamy white spots or patches on the tongue, gums, roof of the mouth or insides of the cheeks.
- If you gently wipe these patches they won't come off. If it does rub off easily it's more likely to be milk coating your baby's tongue and not thrush.
- You may find that your baby is unsettled when feeding or has a white film on their lips.

- Some babies also have nappy rash (sometimes called "napkin dermatitis") which won't clear up which is caused by the same yeast infection.
- In breast-feeding babies, it is possible for a thrush infection to be passed from their mouth to your nipples. This can be very painful. Your nipples can become cracked and sore, or sometimes red and shiny. This will need treatment from your GP.

## Is it uncomfortable for my baby?

While thrush is a mild infection, it can be uncomfortable and sometimes painful for a baby.

## What if I am breastfeeding?

If you have any infection in your breasts and you are breastfeeding, you may find it very painful to feed or express milk. This is usually a burning nipple pain in both breasts which does not go away even after careful re positioning of your baby. Women often describe this as a shooting or stabbing pain in the breasts.

Your nipples can become cracked and sore and breasts can be red and shiny but you do not usually see any discharge (other than milk) from the nipples.

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## Is there anything I can do to help my baby at home?

- take the time to wash your baby's hands, toys, and pacifiers (dummies).
- wash any towels, clothing, and bras that may have come into contact with your nipples, ideally in a hot wash cycle
- if you're pumping your milk, keep it refrigerated until just before use
- remember to sterilise your breast pump and the parts that come with it
- if you are using bottles, make sure these are adequately sterilised
- make sure your breasts are dry after every feeding
- avoid using disposable nursing pads with a plastic backing, and remember to change your nursing pads when they get wet.

## Does thrush need treatment?

In some babies, no treatment is needed. Many mild cases of oral thrush only last a few days or so.

- Book an appointment to see your GP if:
- your baby is distressed and the thrush is worsening - as this will need to be treated
  - you are breast feeding, you will also need an anti-fungal treatment (usually by mouth) so you do not re- infect each other
  - you have already received treatment your symptoms are not improving after 48 hours

## What is the treatment?

- thrush is usually treated with an anti-fungal gel or liquid which goes in the mouth. This is safe for your baby to have and can be prescribed by your GP.
- some babies will also need an anti-fungal cream for the nappy area too in order to help clear this up.
- ensure you wash your hands with soap and warm water thoroughly before and after treating your baby.
- if you are breastfeeding you will need to be prescribed an anti-fungal treatment by your GP. This is usually a tablet to be taken orally

## How long does thrush last?

Once treatment has started, symptoms should improve within 2-3 days. It will take a little longer (around 7 days) for the infection to completely clear.

### Get an urgent same day appointment with your GP or call NHS 111 if:

- your baby is not feeding well (less than half their usual feeds)
- your baby has not passed urine at least 3 times in 24 hours.

## For more information

### NHS Conditions

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding-problems/thrush>

For more breast feeding advice including videos & where to get support:

<https://kingstonhospital.nhs.uk/following-birth/infant-feeding/>

<https://kingstonhospital.nhs.uk/following-birth/infant-feeding/breastfeeding/>

**National Breastfeeding Helpline:** 0300 100 0212

