



Pharmaceutical  
Society of Australia



# Thrush

## (Candidiasis)

**Thrush is a common infection caused by a fungus called ‘candida’. Candida is one of the many microorganisms that normally live harmlessly in and on our bodies. If the normal balance of microorganisms is upset, candida can flourish and cause thrush. Thrush can be effectively treated with antifungal medicines available from a pharmacist.**

The common sites for thrush infection are the mouth, vagina, skin and bowel.

### Oral thrush

#### Symptoms

- White or creamy slightly raised patches anywhere in the mouth. Red, bleeding areas when white patches are wiped off.
- Red and painful areas in mouth and on tongue.
- Redness and swelling under dentures.
- Sore red splits at each side of the mouth.

#### Treatment

- Antifungal medicines for oral thrush are available as suspensions, gels and lozenges.
- Rinse medicines well around the mouth for as long as possible before swallowing.
- Those who wear dentures should apply medicine to cleaned dentures before insertion.
- Use medicine after eating, as food can decrease its effectiveness.
- 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 an episode of oral thrush.
- Clean dentures well with a brush and leave them out overnight.
- Rinse mouth out with water after using an asthma ‘preventer’ inhaler. Use a spacer device with metered dose inhalers.
- Don’t smoke.

### Vaginal thrush

#### Symptoms

- Itching, burning and soreness in the vagina and vulva.
- Redness or swelling at the opening of the vagina.
- Burning around outside of the vagina when passing urine.
- White, cottage cheese-like vaginal discharge, with little or no odour.
- Pain or discomfort during intercourse.

#### Treatment

Thrush in and around the vagina can be treated with:

- A single oral dose (capsule) of antifungal medicine – avoid if pregnant or breastfeeding
- Antifungal cream or pessaries inserted into the vagina
- Antifungal cream for the outside genital area.

Combination products containing either an oral capsule or intravaginal pessary, with a cream for external use, are available.

If inserting pessaries or cream into the vagina:

- Use at night
- Use panty liners to stop leakage onto underwear
- Continue using treatments even during a menstrual period
- Condoms, diaphragms and cervical caps may be damaged by vaginal treatments. Avoid using these contraceptives during and for three days after finishing treatment
- Pregnant women are advised to take care if using a vaginal applicator. It is 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 etc.
- 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 with spots or scaly patches around the edges; skin may become raw and bleed.
- May be burning, sore and sometimes 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 clothing made of natural fibres, such as cotton.
- Keep skin as clean and dry as possible.

## 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 experience pain when passing urine.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- 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 at various sites, including:

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

## Related fact cards

- *Asthma Medicines*
- *Diabetes Type 1*
- *Diabetes Type 2*
- *Dry Mouth*
- *HIV/AIDS*
- *Nappy Rash*
- *Tinea*

## 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](http://www.dermnetnz.org)

**HEALTHInsite** – website [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

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

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