



# 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 our bodies. If the balance of micro-organisms is upset, candida can flourish and cause thrush. Thrush can be effectively treated with antifungal medicines.**

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

## Signs and symptoms

### Vaginal thrush

- Itching or soreness around vagina.
- Burning around outside of the vagina when passing urine.
- White, cottage cheese-like vaginal discharge, with little odour.
- Pain or discomfort during intercourse.
- Swelling at the opening of the vagina.

### Oral thrush

- White or cream slightly raised patches anywhere in the mouth.
- Red, slightly bleeding areas when patches are wiped off.
- Sore mouth, particularly on eating.
- Redness and swelling under dentures.
- Painful red tongue.

### Thrush on the skin

- Occurs especially in areas that are warm, moist or irritated, (e.g., nappy area, groin, under breasts 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.

## Risks

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

- Diabetes – recurring thrush may be a sign of undiagnosed diabetes
- Poor general health, stress
- Poor diet, being overweight

- Wearing 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
- Wearing dentures
- Dry mouth
- Medicines and medical conditions that weaken the immune system – (e.g., chemotherapy, AIDS)
- Hormone changes – (e.g., pregnancy, contraceptive pill, hormone replacement therapy)
- Antibiotic therapy
- Corticosteroid medicines, including inhaled asthma 'preventer' medicines.

## Treatment

Antifungal medicines for thrush are available from a pharmacy without a prescription. Ask a pharmacist for advice.

### Vaginal thrush

Thrush in and around the vagina can be treated with:

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

Combination products containing either an oral capsule or intra-vaginal pessary, together with a cream for external use, are available.

If inserting pessaries or cream into the vagina:

- Use at night
- Use pantyliners 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 should not use a vaginal applicator. Insert vaginal thrush treatments using a clean finger.

## Oral thrush

- Medicines for oral thrush are available as suspensions, gels and lozenges.
- Rinse well around the mouth for as long as possible before swallowing.
- Those who wear dentures should apply the medicine to the dentures.
- Use the medicine after eating, as food can decrease its effectiveness.
- Babies often have candida nappy rash at the same time as oral thrush. This will also need treatment.

## Thrush on the skin

Antifungal medicines for the skin are available as creams, powders, lotions and gels.

**Note:** Some probiotic medicines and yoghurt can help to manage and prevent thrush – ask a pharmacist, doctor or naturopath for advice.

## Self care

### Vaginal thrush

- 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.

## Important

See a doctor if you have symptoms of thrush and:

- This is the first time you have noticed them
- Symptoms have not improved after three days of treatment
- You have had thrush more than twice in the past six months
- You are under 16 or over 60 years of age
- You also have pain, fever or are feeling unwell
- You also have cancer
- The discharge from your vagina is watery and/ or has a strong smell
- You have unusual bleeding from your vagina
- You are, or could be, pregnant
- You experience pain when passing urine.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Blot rather than wipe with toilet paper when the vagina is sore.
- Bathing the area using one teaspoon of salt in a litre of warm water or 20ml vinegar or lemon juice in a litre of water may relieve the symptoms.
- 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.

## Thrush on the skin

- Wear clothing made of natural fibres, such as cotton.
- Dry skin well after washing.
- Use a barrier cream or a drying powder to reduce wetness and irritation – ask a pharmacist.

## Oral thrush

- Brush teeth thoroughly after meals.
- Clean dentures well with a brush.
- Rinse mouth out with water after using an asthma 'preventer' inhaler.
- Don't smoke.

## Related fact cards

- *Asthma Medicines*
- *Diabetes*
- *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

**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.

**Pharmacy Self Care Support** – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

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

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