

MOUTH SORES

There are many different types of mouth sores. They range from minor irritation caused by friction to painful, contagious outbreaks from viruses. Mouth sores may also be a symptom of a disease. No matter what the case, see your dentist about any sore that lasts over a week.

Canker sores (aphthous ulcers) are common, small, white or gray ulcers with red borders. They appear inside the mouth, either alone or in clusters. Sometimes you feel a tingling in the area before they erupt. They are not contagious. Canker sores are often confused with cold sores; however, cold sores occur outside the mouth.

The cause of canker sores is unknown. It may be a bacteria or virus. They may be caused by tissue injury from a bite, burn, sharp tooth, or dental work. They may be an allergic reaction to certain citrus or acidic fruits and vegetables. Some cases may be caused by an impaired immune system, gastrointestinal tract disease, nutritional problems, or stress.

Canker sores usually heal on their own after a week or two. Over-the-counter topical ointments or antimicrobial mouth rinses may provide temporary relief from pain. Avoid food and liquids that irritate the sore. Your dentist may recommend antibiotics to reduce secondary infection.

See your dentist if you have any of the following conditions:

- Unusually large sores or those that last longer than 3 weeks
- High fever
- Sores that are spreading
- Intolerable pain
- Difficulty drinking enough fluids

Cold sores (fever blisters or Herpes simplex) are fluid-filled blisters around the

edge of the lips, under the nose, or around the chin. Cold sores are caused by herpes virus, and are highly contagious. The initial infection (primary herpes) often occurs before adulthood. Once you are infected with primary herpes, the virus stays in your body, causing occasional attacks. However, for some people, the virus remains inactive.

An outbreak of cold sores may follow a fever, sunburn or exposure to sunlight, an allergic reaction, grazed skin, or emotional stress.

Although there is no cure for herpes infections, cold sore blisters usually heal of their own accord in a week. Over-the-counter topical anesthetics can provide some temporary relief. Prescription antiviral drugs may reduce these kinds of viral infections. Talk to your dentist or doctor about your options.

Leukoplakia is a thick, whitish patch that forms on the inside of your cheeks, gums or tongue. These patches are caused by excess cell growth and are common among tobacco users. They can also result from irritation, such as dental work or chewing on the inside of the cheek.

Treatment begins with changing the factors that contribute to the lesion: quitting tobacco or replacing ill-fitting dental

work. Some leukoplakia may progress to cancer. Your dentist may recommend a biopsy if the patch appears precancerous, and then schedule you for periodic exams to monitor the area.

Candidiasis (moniliasis or oral thrush) is a fungal infection that occurs when yeast (*Candida albicans*) is produced in large numbers. It appears as creamy, yellow-white or red patches on moist surfaces in your mouth. Areas under the patch may be painful. Candidiasis is common among denture wearers and those who are elderly or debilitated by disease. It also occurs when you have a problem with your immune system, or have dry mouth syndrome. An attack may occur after an antibiotic treatment, which can decrease normal bacteria in your mouth.

Treatment involves controlling the conditions that caused the outbreak. Good oral hygiene is essential. Dentures should be cleaned thoroughly and removed at bedtime. For dry mouth, saliva substitutes may be helpful. If antibiotics are the cause, reducing the dose or changing the medication may help. Antifungal medications may be used when the underlying cause cannot be avoided.

