

# Mouth Ulcers

**Mouth ulcers are small, painful sores on the inside lining of the mouth.**

**They usually develop on the inside of the lips and cheeks and on the underneath and edge of the tongue. Medicines from a pharmacist may reduce the pain and help mouth ulcers to heal.**

Mouthy ulcers are sores on the inside lining of the mouth. Blisters or sores on the lips or around the outside of the mouth are usually cold sores, not mouth ulcers. A pharmacist or doctor can help you know the difference.

## Causes

A variety of different things can damage or affect the inside lining of the mouth, leading to a mouth ulcer. Sometimes the cause of a mouth ulcer is known (e.g., biting your cheek or tongue), but sometimes the cause of a mouth ulcer is not known.

Possible triggers for mouth ulcers include:

- Biting or chewing the inside of the cheek
- Very hot food or drinks
- Some foods (e.g., caffeine, tangy cheese, citrus fruit, chocolate, spicy or salty food)
- Rough tooth brushing
- Some toothpastes and mouth rinses
- Dentures, braces, rough dental fillings or sharp edges on teeth
- Certain medicines, including herbal remedies – ask a pharmacist



- Some cancer treatments
- Some medical conditions (e.g., infection, inflammatory bowel disease, coeliac disease)
- A dry mouth (which may be due to medicines or medical conditions)
- Quitting smoking
- Some nutritional deficiencies (e.g., low iron, folic acid, vitamin B12)
- Hormone changes (e.g., menstruation)
- Stress.

## Aphthous Ulcers

### (Canker Sores)

Aphthous ulcers are a type of mouth ulcer that often has no known cause or trigger. They often appear for the first time between 10 and 19 years of age, then occasionally reappear, becoming less frequent and less severe with age. A tendency to get aphthous ulcers may be an inherited condition.

Most aphthous ulcers are:

- Round or oval shaped, shallow sores, about 3–5 mm across
- Yellow to grey-white in colour with redness and swelling around them
- Very painful for about 4 days.

Some people feel pain or burning on the affected area, 1–2 days before an ulcer appears.

Aphthous ulcers are not contagious and most heal in 7–10 days without scarring.

## Medicines

Most mouth ulcers heal by themselves without treatment, but medicines may reduce the discomfort and the healing time. There is a range of non-prescription products available for mouth ulcers. Ask a pharmacist for advice.

### Pastes:

- Form a protective, soothing layer over the mouth ulcer
- Some pastes contain an anti-inflammatory medicine to reduce pain and swelling. These medicines may speed healing, especially if applied as soon as the ulcer begins.

### Mouthwashes and lozenges:

- Some products contain an antiseptic to stop bacteria in the mouth from infecting the ulcer
- Some products contain a medicine to reduce pain and swelling
- Are helpful for treating mouth ulcers that are in hard to reach places
- Help keep the mouth clean if it is too painful to brush teeth properly.

### Gels, paints, lozenges:

- Some products contain an antiseptic to stop bacteria from infecting the ulcer
- Some products contain a medicine to reduce pain and swelling
- Some products contain a local anaesthetic to numb the ulcer

## Self care

- Try to identify and avoid foods and drinks which can cause or irritate mouth ulcers.
- Keep your mouth and teeth clean with regular brushing and flossing. If the ulcer is too painful to brush your teeth, use an antiseptic mouthwash.
- Brush your teeth gently, using a soft toothbrush.
- If mouth ulcers are very painful, use a pain-relieving medicine before eating.
- Try sucking on ice to help relieve the pain of mouth ulcers.
- Don't chew and talk at the same time
- Have dentures checked regularly to make sure they fit well.
- Rinse dentures with water before insertion.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises otherwise).
- Eat regular healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Consider vitamin and mineral supplements.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques to help manage stress.
- Don't smoke.

## Important

Although most mouth ulcers are a minor problem, sometimes they are a symptom of a more serious medical condition. Consult a doctor if mouth ulcers:

- Last more than two weeks
- Are larger than 1 cm across
- Heal with scarring
- Occur often (e.g., every 1–2 weeks)
- Occur in crops of 5 to 10, or more
- Occur with a sore throat, fever or other signs of illness
- Are painless
- Make it difficult to drink adequate fluid.
- Occur in a child under 10 years of age

Consult a dentist if you have sharp tooth edges or dental appliances that seem to cause mouth ulcers

## For more information

### **New Zealand Dermatological Society Inc**

website [www.dermnetnz.org](http://www.dermnetnz.org)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### **National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **The Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.*

*Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

## Related fact cards

- » *Cold Sores*
- » *Dry Mouth*
- » *Oral Health*
- » *Pain Relievers*
- » *Relaxation Techniques*
- » *Vitamins*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: