Mouth Ulcers

Patient information leaflet

Common Ailments Service

Only use this leaflet if your pharmacist has advised you about your or your child's condition.

Mouth ulcers are painful sores that develop inside the mouth. They are common and often affect people who are otherwise healthy. Mouth ulcers usually heal on their own within 2 weeks without leaving a scar.

You may have one ulcer or several ulcers at the same time. They are usually white or pale yellow with a red area around them. They can be round or oval and are usually less than 1cm across.

Mouth ulcers are often caused by damage to the inside of the mouth. This can happen if you:

- bite the inside of your cheek
- have a sharp or broken tooth
- wear dentures that do not fit properly

Other things that may trigger mouth ulcers include:

- stress and anxiety
- your genes – mouth ulcers run in some families
- some medicines – ask your pharmacist if your medicines could be the cause
- low iron, vitamin B12 or folic acid levels
- changes in hormone levels, such as during periods
- toothpaste containing sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS)
- stopping smoking – people may develop ulcers when they first stop smoking
- eating certain foods, such as acidic foods, chocolate, coffee, peanuts and, for some people, gluten-containing foods

You are more likely to get mouth ulcers if you have:

- a weakened immune system
- inflammatory bowel disease or coeliac disease
- Behçet's syndrome
- a viral infection such as chickenpox or hand, foot and mouth disease

Treatment and Prevention

It is not always possible to stop mouth ulcers from coming back. Most ulcers are mild and may not need treatment.

To reduce the pain of ulcers:

- use a soft toothbrush
- eat foods that are easy to chew
- avoid hard foods such as toast and crisps
- avoid spicy or very salty foods and acidic food and drinks
- drink cool drinks through a straw

Treatment and Prevention

Some people find that a salt-water (saline) mouthwash helps ease the pain of mouth ulcers. To make a salt-water mouthwash:

1. Dissolve half a teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water.
2. Let the mouthwash cool until it is lukewarm.
3. Take some of the mouthwash in your mouth, swill it around and spit it out.

Do this whenever you need to. **Do not swallow the salt mouthwash.**

Medicines that can help

These medicines are not suitable for everyone. Make sure you have asked your pharmacist for advice about what treatment is best for you or your child.

Chlorhexidine 0.2% mouthwash may prevent infection, reduce the pain and help your mouth ulcer to heal more quickly. This mouthwash may contain a small amount of alcohol. You can use chlorhexidine mouthwash if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Chlorhexidine can stain your teeth and tongue. To reduce staining, brush your teeth before using the mouthwash and avoid drinking tea, coffee and red wine. Toothpaste can make the chlorhexidine less effective so rinse your mouth well with water after brushing.

Benzydamine 0.15% oromucosal spray may help with the pain. The effect does not last very long, so you may need to use it several times a day. Do not use benzydamine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Benzydamine spray contains a small amount of alcohol.

Anaesthetic gels may help to ease the pain of mouth ulcers. You can buy these from your local pharmacy.

Self-care at home

You may be less likely to get mouth ulcers again if you:

- avoid acidic foods, or any foods that you think trigger your mouth ulcers
- avoid toothpaste containing sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS)
- take part in activities that help you relax, such as yoga, meditation or exercise

Always read the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine.
If you think a medicine is causing side effects, tell a doctor, nurse or pharmacist. You can also report side effects using the Yellow Card app or at yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk

When to Get Help

Ask for a GP or dentist appointment if:

- your mouth ulcer gets bigger than 1cm across
- you have had big or deep mouth ulcers twice in the last 12 months and they have come back again
- you find that sharp or broken teeth, dentures, braces or retainers, or rough fillings are causing your ulcers (see a dentist)

Ask for a GP appointment in the next few days if:

- your ulcer stops you eating or drinking
- you develop a mouth ulcer that does not hurt at all
- your mouth ulcer becomes more painful, red or is bleeding – you may have an infection
- you develop a high temperature or feel very unwell
- you develop large groups of ulcers
- you develop ulcers on your gums, the roof of your mouth, or on other parts of your body

Ask for an urgent GP or dentist appointment if:

- you have had a mouth ulcer for more than 3 weeks

Mouth ulcers that last longer than 3 weeks may be an early sign that you have another illness, including mouth cancer

See the NHS 111 Wales website or call 111 for information on accessing NHS dental services in Wales.

If you are worried that your or your child's condition is not getting better, or is getting worse, talk to your GP.

More information

For more information on mouth ulcers or a medicine, talk to your pharmacist or look at the following websites:
NHS 111 Wales: 111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/m/article/mouthulcer/
Patient UK: patient.info/oral-dental-care/mouth-ulcers-leaflet
Medicines A-Z: www.nhs.uk/medicines/

Information from the above resources is included in this leaflet.

Mae'r daflen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This leaflet is also available in Welsh.

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