



THRUSH

Candidiasis

Thrush is caused by a yeast-like fungus called candida, one of many organisms that live in the mouth, vagina and bowel. These organisms are harmless until something upsets their normal balance. If this occurs, and conditions are right, candida multiplies and can cause thrush symptoms.

The most common types of thrush are vaginal and oral (mouth).

Signs and symptoms

Vaginal thrush

- Itching or soreness around vagina.
- Burning around outside of the vagina when passing urine.
- Change in vaginal discharge – becomes white and cottage-cheese like.
- Pain or discomfort during intercourse.
- Swelling at the opening of the vagina.

Oral thrush

- White or cream slightly raised patches on the tongue, cheeks, throat and/or gums.
- Red, slightly bleeding areas if these patches are picked/scratched.
- Sore mouth, particularly on eating.
- Redness and swelling under dentures.

Thrush on the skin

- Occurs on the skin, especially in areas that are warm, moist or irritated, e.g. nappy area, armpits, groin and under the breasts.
- Appears as a 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 may make people more likely to get thrush:

- Diabetes (recurring thrush may be an indicator of undiagnosed diabetes – see a doctor).
- Poor diet, poor general health, stress.
- Being overweight.
- Drugs and diseases that affect the immune system (chemotherapy or AIDS patients).

- Being pregnant, taking some types of contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy (ask a doctor or pharmacist).
- Taking certain antibiotics.
- Wearing tight clothes or underwear that is not pure cotton.
- Things that irritate the skin such as vaginal deodorants, bubble baths or some soaps.
- Infection from the bowel, caused by wiping toilet paper from back to front.
- Wearing dentures (oral thrush only).
- Steroid medicines, including inhaled asthma 'preventer' medicine (oral thrush only).

Vaginal thrush

- Conventional vaginal thrush medicines (tablets/pessaries and creams) are usually inserted into the vagina using an applicator.
- An oral capsule is now available. The full treatment is one capsule once by mouth. Ask the pharmacist for more information.
- Oral and vaginal medicines are equally effective – the choice depends on patient preference.

Important

You should see a doctor if you have symptoms of thrush when:

- 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 bad smell.
- You have unusual bleeding from your vagina.
- You are, or could be, pregnant.
- You have pain when passing urine.

- Use pantyliners to stop topical thrush medicine leaking onto underwear.
- Continue using medicines even during the period.
- Condoms, diaphragms and cervical caps may be damaged by topical thrush medicines. Avoid using these contraceptive products during, and for three days after finishing, treatment with topical thrush medicines.
- Those who are pregnant should avoid using an applicator. Insert vaginal thrush medicines using a clean finger. Do not use oral medicine if pregnant. (Ask the pharmacist for advice).

Oral thrush

- Oral thrush medicines come as suspensions, gels and lozenges.
- Keep the medicine dose in the mouth for as long as possible before swallowing. Those who wear dentures should apply the medicine to the dentures.
- Do not take oral thrush medicines before eating. Eating after using the medicine will decrease its effectiveness.
- Babies often have candidial nappy rash at the same time as oral thrush. This will also need treatment.

Thrush on the skin

Thrush medicines for the skin are available as creams, powders and lotions. A pharmacist can suggest the most suitable treatment for the infection.

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 the bottom 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.
- 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 laundry detergents and fabric softeners that may irritate the area. Soap, deodorants and other perfumed products may also irritate.
- If you are prescribed antibiotics and are prone to thrush, tell the doctor.

Thrush on the skin

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

Oral thrush

- Brush the teeth thoroughly after meals.
- Some mouthwashes can help (ask the pharmacist).
- Those who wear dentures should clean them well with a brush and ask a dentist to check their fit.
- Those who use a steroid asthma 'preventer' inhaler should rinse the mouth with water after using it (ask the pharmacist).
- Stop smoking.
- Those with cancer should not try self care (see a doctor).

Other fact cards of interest

- Asthma series
- Diabetes
- HIV/AIDS
- Skin Rash
- Tinea

Contact

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

A Self Care pharmacy – to locate telephone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

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

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Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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