Life Problems

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Life is way less fun when smiling causes you pain.

We tend to ignore our lips when they’re happy, but when they’re mad, they demand our attention. We use them to talk, eat, drink, smile, kiss, whistle, and laugh, so it’s hard to ignore them when they’re causing us pain.

Who knew a fresh, Jamaican mango could cause so much trouble? Back in 2014, I was on vacation in Jamaica with my family when I bit into a mango straight off the tree. Sounds innocent enough, but it turns out that mango skin has a chemical called urushiol, also found in poison ivy! After three days, my lips were peeling, burning, and blistering—an allergic reaction to the mango skin.

What followed was a period of several months of serious lip trouble, including contact, exfoliative, and angular cheilitis. It was incredibly frustrating and uncomfortable, but ultimately led to a deeper understanding of what my lips needed to heal.

If you’re struggling with angry lips, the first step is to figure out whether the problem lies with your lips themselves, or whether there’s a deeper, underlying cause. A visit with your healthcare provider may be in order to review any other symptoms you’re having, and possibly some bloodwork to rule out vitamin and mineral deficiencies, or other systemic illnesses that need attention.

SO... WHAT ARE LIP PROBLEMS?

There are simple and complicated cases of cheilitis, or lip inflammation. Simpler cases of cheilitis—the main focus of this article—include the following:

• Cheilitis simplex, a fancy way of describing red, chapped lips, often caused by frequent lip licking.

• Eczematous or contact cheilitis, caused by irritation from something contacting the lips, such as lipstick, toothpaste, lip balms—even nail polish!

• Exfoliative cheilitis, which is inflammation of the lips accompanied by constant peeling and sometimes cracking and bleeding.

• Angular cheilitis, which occurs at the corners of the mouth, and may cause pain and bleeding when the mouth opens wide.
STOP USING

Steroids
Unless you have a condition that requires the use of long-term steroids, wean slowly off any steroid ointments or creams. Steroids are a temporary solution and can cause terrible withdrawal symptoms and thinning of the skin on the lips and the face.

Sodium lauryl/laureth sulfate
Eliminate SLS in all hair care, body wash, toothpaste, and laundry detergent. It’s a skin irritant, and your lips, which have thinner skin, are especially susceptible.

Medicated Lip Balms
Many over-the-counter medicated balms contain menthol, which can be irritating to compromised lips.

Lipsticks with synthetic color and fragrance
Dyes and fragrance in lip products can cause or exacerbate lip inflammation. Avoid ingredients like Red Lake, Blue Lake, FD&C colors, fragrance, and Parfum. Look for products with natural colorants and essential oils. If your lips are extremely upset, avoid essential oils, too.

Face creams with synthetic color or fragrance
Because if you’re putting a cream on your face, some of it will end up on your lips.

START USING

Lip Doctor
This essential-oil free balm is what finally soothed my lips. Try using it and nothing else for a few days.

Petroleum jelly
If your lips don’t improve with Lip Doctor, or if you’re waiting for it to arrive, you can try using pure, white petroleum jelly to allow your lips to hold moisture and begin to heal. Apply a thin layer with a clean finger or cotton swab after cleansing.

As your lips begin to heal, you may find that they can tolerate more products. But proceed with caution! As you add lip products back to your routine, do it slowly, and keep notes. If you feel any irritation, you can refer to your notes to figure out which ingredient was added most recently and try removing it again.

Try applying a thick layer of Lip Repair or raw manuka honey to your lips just before you go to bed. Sleep is an excellent time to treat your lips, since you won’t be doing much eating or drinking for a few hours.

If you’re not making progress despite using only natural products, look for ingredients from nature that can cause allergies—every person has different triggers. The most common allergens from the natural world are lanolin, propolis (in beeswax), balsam of peru (an essential oil), peppermint essential oil, and ricinoleic acid, a compound found only in castor oil.

Use particular caution with citrus oils in skin and lip care products, and even when eating or drinking citrus in the sun. A margarita on the beach can turn into a serious burn from even one drop of lime essential oil on your lips!

FOR THE SKIN

Osmia Lip Doctor
Osmia Lip Repair
Osmia Purely Simple Face Cream

HAVING TROUBLE?

Everyone reacts differently to skincare plans—if you are not seeing results, please email us and we can help adjust your routine or suggest a few products from other brands that are gentle enough to try. While we hope Osmia works as well for you as it has for so many others, we are committed to helping you see results. We’ll do our absolute best to customize your routine and guide you toward your healthiest skin.
Additional homework for greater success:

- Stop licking your lips. It’s impossible for lips to heal if they are constantly being attacked by your tongue. Saliva evaporates from the lips, pulling moisture and leaving them dehydrated. In addition, digestive enzymes from saliva can further dry and irritate your lips.

- Stop picking and peeling your lips. This prevents healing and may introduce bacteria or yeast that can cause chronic infection.

- Be sure your toothpaste is free of fluoride and sodium lauryl/laureth sulfate, as well as synthetic flavoring. If you’re sensitive to essential oils, you can even brush with a blend of baking soda and clay until your lips are strong again.

- Avoid spicy or acidic foods and extremely hot beverages.

- Visit an allergy specialist for skin testing to rule out an allergy to a specific ingredient, like chemical sunscreens, nickel, fragrance, chemical sunscreens, or ricinoleic acid (a component in castor oil).

- To learn more about each lip condition, read this.

You can do this.

When my lips were peeling and cracking for almost three months, I felt discouraged and sad—we don’t realize what a blessing it is to be able to smile without discomfort! With homework and patience, I figured out that I had developed an allergy to castor oil. Once I eliminated it (and formulated Lip Doctor) things finally started to improve.

As you begin to do your homework, remember that stress makes symptoms worse, so have kindness and compassion for your poor little lips. After all, nobody wants to smile more than they do!

With health and joy,

Sarah