

MOUTH ULCERS

INTRODUCTION

Also known as *aphthous ulcers*, mouth ulcers are painful, clearly defined, round, or oval sores which form in the mouth. Most people suffer from occasional mouth ulcers but one in five people suffer from recurrent mouth ulcers.

The three main types of mouth ulcer are:

Minor ulcer – This is the most common type of ulcer. It account for 80% of all mouth ulcers. They are small (2-8mm in diameter) and normally heal naturally within 10-14 days. A minor ulcer will not cause any scarring.

Major ulcer - This type of ulcer is deeper and larger than a minor ulcer, and usually has a raised or irregular border. A major ulcer is usually 1cm or more in diameter. This type of ulcer will heal more slowly, over a period of several weeks, and can cause scarring. Approximately 10% of mouth ulcers are major.

Herpetiform ulcers - These ulcers form as multiple, pinhead sized sores. The number of ulcers can range from 5-100. These tiny ulcers often fuse together to form larger, irregular shaped sores which are extremely painful. Approximately 5-10% of mouth ulcers are herpetiform.

Mouth ulcers cannot be passed from person to person. For example, you cannot get an ulcer from kissing someone, or from sharing a glass, or cutlery.

SYMPTOMS

A mouth ulcer will be round or oval in shape. It will be white, yellow, or grey in colour, and will be inflamed around the edge. Most mouth ulcers will only last between 10-14 days, although in more severe cases, they may last for several weeks.

CAUSES

Most minor, single mouth ulcers are caused by damage to the mouth. For example, you may accidentally bite the inside of your cheek while you are eating or burn the inside of mouth with hot food. Damage to your mouth can also occur if you use a toothbrush incorrectly, or from a sharp tooth, or filling.

RECURRENT MOUTH ULCERS

The cause of recurrent mouth ulcers is often unknown. However some possible causes include

1. **Oral trauma** – (e.g.) excessive tooth brushing, or chewing sharp, or hard,

- foods.
2. **Anxiety.**
 3. **Stress.**
 4. **Certain foods** - some people may find that eating certain foods can cause them to develop more ulcers. Foods that have been identified as increasing the risk of ulcers include chocolate, coffee, peanuts, almonds, strawberries, cheese, tomatoes and wheat flour.
 5. **Hormonal changes** - women notice that they are more likely to have an ulcer during their period due to hormonal changes at this time.
 6. **Stopping smoking**-may cause a temporary increase in ulcers.
 7. **Family history**-ulcers can run in families.
 8. **Underlying condition**- certain conditions can cause ulcers, including vitamin B12 Iron deficiency, Iron deficiency, Coeliac disease, Crohn's disease and Immunodeficiency
 9. **Medication**- some prescription medication can mouth ulcers. Examples include Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs used for arthritis pain, nicorandil which is used for angina and beta-blockers which are used for many heart conditions including angina and high blood pressure.

TREATMENT

Mouth ulcers will normally heal naturally without the need for treatment. However if an ulcer lasts for more than 3 weeks you should get checked at a GP as it may be due to a more serious condition. Some of the different types of medicine you can purchase over the counter (OTC) at your pharmacy or be prescribed by your GP are as follows:

Corticosteroids

A corticosteroid is a type of medicine that helps reduce inflammation. By reducing the inflammation of your ulcer, you should also find that it is less painful. These medications are only available on prescription for severe ulcers (eg Corlan[®] Pellets

Antimicrobial mouthwash

Antimicrobial mouthwash helps to kill any micro-organisms, such as bacteria, viruses, or fungi that may cause a mouth infection if you cannot brush your teeth properly (eg Listerine (now on a special price offer in Whelehans)

Analgesics

There are many OTC remedies available in Pharmacy. In Whelehans we recommend Carbosan[®] gel as it gives fast effective relief of mouth ulcers.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR?

See a doctor or dentist if a mouth ulcer lasts more than 2-3 weeks. Particularly if it does not appear to be like my description in this article or shows no sign of healing or going. This is because other types of ulcer can occur in the mouth and mouth cancer may first

seem like a mouth ulcer.

PREVENTION

To prevent getting mouth ulcers, try to avoid becoming run down by making sure that you eat a balanced diet, take regular exercise, and learn to effectively manage stress. If you are prone to recurrent ulcers, try to avoid damaging the inside of your mouth by using a softer toothbrush and avoiding hard, brittle, or sharp-edged foods. Make sure that your teeth are in good order by regularly visiting your dentist. Flossing regularly reduces bacteria in the mouth.

JUST THE TONIC!

In Whelehans, we find that Whelehans Tonic benefits people with mouth ulcers, especially those who suffer from recurrent ulcers. This is because we add a high concentration of B vitamins which prevent and help clear up ulcers. It will naturally give you a great energy boost too.

Lysine is a natural amino acid found in the body. There is evidence that taking a supplement of lysine prevents and speeds up healing of mouth ulcers. In Whelehans, we find Sona[®] Lysine tablets very popular for this purpose.

Disclaimer: Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans, log on to www.whelehans.ie or dial 04493 34591. You can also e-mail queries to info@whelehans.ie.