

When your child has thrush

By Barton D. Schmitt, MD



Thrush is an infection caused by a yeast called candida that grows rapidly on the lining of the mouth. It produces white, irregularly shaped patches that coat the inside of the mouth and sometimes the tongue. The patches cannot be washed away or wiped off easily like milk. (If the only symptom is a uniformly white tongue, it's caused by a milk diet, not thrush.)

Thrush occurs in both bottle-fed and breastfed babies in areas of the mouth irritated by prolonged sucking (as when the baby sleeps with a bottle or pacifier) or a large pacifier or nipple. It can also occur when your child has recently been taking a broad spectrum antibiotic. It is not contagious.

HOME CARE

Give medication as prescribed by your child's doctor. The drug used to clear up thrush is nystatin oral suspension. It requires a prescription. Give 1 mL of nystatin four times a day. Place it in the front of the mouth or wherever you see the thrush. It doesn't do any good once it's swallowed. If the thrush doesn't respond in a few days, rub nystatin directly on the affected areas with gauze wrapped around your finger or cotton swab. Apply it after meals, or at least don't feed your baby anything for 30 minutes after application. Give the medication for at least seven days or until the thrush has been completely gone for three days. If you are breastfeeding, apply nystatin to any irritated areas on your nipples.

Decrease your child's sucking time.

Reduce sucking time to 20 minutes or less per feeding. If eating and sucking are painful for your child, temporarily use a cup, a spoon, or a dropper.

Restrict use of the pacifier. Eliminate the pacifier temporarily except when your child really needs to go sleep. If he is using an orthodontic-type pacifier, switch to a smaller, regular shaped one. Soak the pacifier and all nipples in hot tap water, for 15 minutes before giving them to your child. If the thrush recurs and your child is bottle-fed, switch to a nipple made from silicone or one with a different shape.

Treat diaper rash associated with thrush.

If your baby has a diaper rash along with thrush, assume that the rash is caused by a yeast infection. Ask your child's doctor for nystatin cream and apply it to the affected area four times a day.

Call our office during regular hours if:

- Your child refuses to eat.
 - The thrush gets worse with treatment.
 - The thrush lasts longer than 10 days.
 - Your child develops an unexplained fever over 100° F (38.7° C).
 - You have other concerns or questions.
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