

Thrush

Thrush is an infection of the mouth with the yeast *Candida*. It is common in newborn infants, resulting in white spots in the mouth. Thrush in newborns is usually a harmless problem that is easily treated. If the infection doesn't clear up within 2 weeks, contact the doctor.

- *Candida* can cause other infections as well. In newborns, *Candida* infection in the diaper area is not unusual.
- Otherwise, *Candida* usually doesn't cause serious infections in healthy people. It can be a problem in people with reduced immune function, such as those infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the virus that causes AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome]).

What is thrush?

Thrush is a common infection of the mouth in newborns. The baby picks up the *Candida* yeast from the mother during birth. A week or so later, white spots appear in the baby's mouth. Babies can also contract thrush during breast or bottle feeding.

Thrush may cause some pain or discomfort, or it may cause no symptoms at all. In healthy infants, thrush may go away on its own, but most cases are treated. You should watch to make sure your baby's infection clears up during treatment.

What does it look like?

- White spots (plaques) appearing inside your baby's mouth: on the inner cheek, gums, or palate (roof of the mouth).
- Underneath the white spots, red tissue that may bleed easily when scraped.
- Sometimes the baby seems uncomfortable. He or she may seem fussy or may feed less because the mouth is sore. However, in most cases, the baby doesn't seem to have any pain.
- White spots usually develop 7 to 10 days after birth. Normally, they clear up gradually over the next 2 weeks. The spots sometimes come back. Thrush is unusual in children over age 1.

What causes thrush?

- Thrush is caused by infection with a yeast called *Candida*. The baby picks up the *Candida* organisms from the mother during birth.
- *Candida* is normally present in the mouth. It usually causes symptoms only in certain situations. In newborns, the immune system isn't yet mature so infection develops earlier.

What increases your baby's risk of getting thrush?

Babies treated with antibiotics for other reasons (such as an ear infection) may be at increased risk of getting thrush.

How is thrush treated?

- Healthy babies with mild thrush may need no treatment. The infection often clears up on its own within 2 weeks. If it doesn't, call our office.
- Thrush and other *Candida* infections can be treated with antibiotics.
- The most common treatment is a prescription drug called nystatin suspension. It works by direct contact with the infected areas of the mouth. Apply this medication to your baby's mouth, four times per day, for about a week. Continue treatment for a day after it looks like the thrush has cleared up.
- Other treatments are available if the problem doesn't clear up with nystatin.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if:

- The white plaques in your baby's mouth haven't cleared up by 2 weeks, or after treatment.
- The thrush is severe or painful, especially if your baby is feeding less than usual.
- The thrush comes back after clearing up, or it develops after the newborn period.
- Your infant has other signs of illness, such as poor weight gain.