



## Thrush (Candidiasis)

Thrush is caused by an overgrowth of fungus. The fungus is something that most people have. It is harmless in healthy people. An immune system weakened by HIV allows the fungus to grow out of control.

It makes cottage cheese-like patches. It is mostly found in the mouth, throat or vagina. When the patches are wiped, they bleed or turn red.

People with HIV and CD4 counts less than 200 are at a greater risk for thrush. Thrush is very harmful if it grows in the throat. This happens when CD4 cell counts fall below 200. It is a sign that HIV has become AIDS.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of thrush can be seen on and under the tongue, inside the cheeks and in the throat.

Another sign is when the mouth and throat burn or hurt. The corners of the mouth may crack, swell or get sore.

When thrush is in the throat it can cause a sore throat. This makes it hard to swallow. There may be pain in your chest. You may not be hungry and feel sick to your stomach.

### Causes

Known causes of thrush include:

- Stress
- Poor diet (like too much alcohol and sugar)
- Not enough rest and sleep
- Antibiotics for bacterial infections (especially for long periods of time)
- Smoking
- Poor oral health (if you do not brush and floss your teeth, or visit a dentist often)

People in good health can control the fungus before it turns to thrush. A weak immune system cannot control it.

### How to Know You Have Thrush

A doctor will take a small piece of skin from the white patches to take a closer look.

To test for thrush in the throat, a doctor may do an exam where a tube with a light and a camera is put in the throat.

### Treatment

If thrush is not treated, it can spread to the bloodstream and travel all over the body.

These steps can be taken to treat thrush:

- For thrush of the mouth, liquids or throat drops are used for treatment. This takes 10 to 14 days.
- Sip water or sugar-free drinks, chew sugar-free gum and eat hard candies to keep the mouth nice and moist.
- Do not smoke, drink alcohol or eat salty foods
- Use a humidifier at night
- Rinse your mouth with salt water or baking soda. Use half a teaspoon of salt or one teaspoon of baking soda in a cup of warm water. Do not swallow the water.

There are anti-fungal meds to treat thrush. Thrush can become resistant to treatment in people with late-stage HIV. Your doctor will help with what meds to use.

## Prevention

These steps can help prevent thrush:

- Brush your teeth after every meal.
- Gargle with alcohol-based mouth washes.
- Limit foods with a lot of sugar.
- Limit foods that have yeast such as bread, beer and wine.
- Eat more yogurt and dairy products.
- Do not smoke.
- Visit the dentist twice a year.

### **For more information**

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

