

ORAL THRUSH

What is it: Thrush is an infection of the mouth caused by candida, also known as yeast. Candida is not limited to the mouth, it can occur on other body parts as well, causing diaper rashes in infants and vaginal yeast infections in women. It is important for nurses to educate patients that most all healthy people have small amounts of the candida fungus present in their mouths, GI tract and on their skin. It is when certain illnesses, medications or extreme stress cause the fungus to overgrow that it causes symptoms.

Who is at risk: Oral thrush can affect anyone but those at higher risk include babies under 6 months of age and older adults. Those that wear dentures can be at more risk for developing thrush. Health conditions such as diabetes and taking certain medications such as antibiotics or oral or inhaled steroids put a patient at higher risk.

Cause: Also called candidiasis, thrush is caused by the fungus *Candida albicans*.

Symptoms: Common symptoms include creamy white, slightly raised patches on the tongue and inner cheeks. It can also invade the roof of the mouth, gums and back of the throat.

How is it diagnosed: Doctors can often diagnose Oral Thrush by examining the mouth. A small scraping may be examined under the microscope to confirm the diagnosis.

Complications: Oral thrush is usually not a problem for healthy children and adults, in those with lowered or weakened immune systems the fungus can spread to their lungs, heart or esophagus making eating painful and difficult. When spread to the intestines, the body is unable to absorb proper nutrients.

Treatment: The treatment is usually an antifungal medication taken for 10 to 14 days. This medication can be in liquid, tablets or lozenges. While the antifungal will take care of the fungus it is important to follow good oral hygiene, limit sugar and yeast containing foods such as bread, beer and wine and stop smoking. For mothers that are nursing and their babies develop thrush, it can be passed back and forth while breastfeeding. A doctor may prescribe the mother an antifungal cream to use on her breasts.

Did you know? Nurses should encourage patients to use the prescribed medication for the entire course, even if the symptoms seem to have cleared.

Source/s:

www.webmd.com

www.mayoclinic.com