
SELF-CARE INFORMATION FOR MOUTH ULCERS

Mouth ulcers are small sores inside the mouth. They can be painful but **are usually harmless** and heal within 1-2 weeks. They are **not contagious** and are different from cold sores, which appear on the lips.

What causes mouth ulcers?

Mouth ulcers are often caused by:

- **Irritation** (e.g., biting your cheek, sharp teeth, ill-fitting dentures).
- **Stress, tiredness, or being run down.**
- **Certain foods** (e.g., spicy, salty, or acidic foods).
- **Brushing too hard or using irritating toothpaste** (some toothpastes contain sodium lauryl sulphate, which can trigger ulcers).
- **Stopping smoking** – some people develop ulcers after quitting.

Could it be something else?

If ulcers **keep coming back or last more than 3 weeks**, they may be linked to:

- **Vitamin B12 or iron deficiency.**
- **Certain medications** (e.g., NSAIDs, beta-blockers, nicorandil).
- **Medical conditions** such as **IBD or coeliac disease.**

Managing your condition

Mouth ulcers need time to heal, and there is no quick fix. Avoiding things that irritate them can help:

- ✓ **Speed up healing**
- ✓ **Reduce pain**
- ✓ **Lower the chance of recurrence.**

How can I avoid triggers?

Most ulcers are caused by things you can prevent, such as:

- **Biting the inside of your cheek** or injury from rough fillings, braces, or sharp teeth.
- **Brushing too hard** or using irritating toothpaste.
- **Eating very spicy, salty, or acidic foods.**

- **Drinking very hot or acidic drinks (e.g., fruit juice, coffee).**
- **Feeling tired, stressed, or anxious** – stress management may help.

Some triggers **cannot always be controlled**, including:

- **Hormonal changes** (e.g., during pregnancy).
- **Genetics** (some people are more prone to ulcers).
- **Certain medical conditions** (e.g., IBD, coeliac disease).

How can I help them heal?

- ✓ Use a **soft toothbrush** and a **mild toothpaste** (avoid sodium lauryl sulphate).
- ✓ Eat **soft foods** and **drink through a straw** if needed.
- ✓ Avoid **spicy, salty, or acidic foods and drinks**.
- ✓ **Stay hydrated** and manage stress.
- ✓ Get **regular dental check-ups** to reduce irritation from sharp teeth or dental work.

Treatments

Your **pharmacist can recommend** simple treatments to help with pain or healing, such as:

- **Antimicrobial mouthwash** (to prevent infection).
- **Pain-relieving mouthwash, gels, or sprays** (e.g., **Difflam**).
- **Corticosteroid lozenges** (to reduce inflammation).

When should I see a doctor or dentist?

Seek advice if your mouth ulcer:





- ◆ Lasts longer than **three weeks**
- ◆ Keeps coming back
- ◆ Becomes more painful, swollen, or red (signs of infection)

Your **GP or dentist** may prescribe stronger medication for persistent or infected ulcers. While most ulcers are harmless, any ulcer lasting more than **three weeks** should be checked.

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist - for advice on over the counter treatments
- NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk

If you need further help:

-  **Call our practice:** 01285 653184 or 01285 653122
-  **Visit our website** to fill out a triage form
-  **For urgent medical advice:** Call **111** (24 hours)
-  **In an emergency:** Call **999**