

## DoctorSays

# Mouth ulcers: Don't brush them aside

Mouth ulcers can be painful to the touch and when you eat, drink or brush your teeth.

The most common form is recurrent aphthous stomatitis. Its cause is unknown, though it affects about 20 per cent of the population.

Mouth ulcers may appear due to the following reasons:

**Trauma:** Mechanical damage, such as contact with sharp food-stuff or accidental biting during talking, can injure the tissue and trigger the formation of an ulcer.

Ulcers can also result from thermal, electrical or chemical burns.

**Idiopathic:** This refers to ulcers that arise spontaneously. Recurrent aphthous stomatitis and Behcet's syndrome fall into this category.

Behcet's syndrome involves the inflammation of blood vessels, and sores in the mouth are one of its most common symptoms.

**Infections:** Hand, foot and mouth disease, cold sores, and chicken pox can present with ulcers as symptoms.

**Systemic diseases:** Ulcers can be a symptom of some haematological disorders and gastrointestinal ailments. An example is Crohn's disease, a chronic inflammatory condition of the gastrointestinal tract.

**Dermatological diseases:** Some disorders, like lichen planus and vesiculobullous disorders, are linked to mouth ulcers.

Lichen planus is a non-infectious itchy rash on the skin or in the mouth, while vesiculobullous disorders refer to a class of diseases that involve the appearance of blisters or fluid-filled lesions on the skin.

**Neoplastic:** This refers to an abnormal growth of tissue, such as squamous cell carcinoma and other tumours. They may occur in the mouth.

There is no treatment that can consistently prevent recurrence.

Remedies to manage symptoms of mouth ulcers include using anti-septic mouthwashes, such as those containing 0.2 per cent chlorhexidine, and topical steroids like triamcinolone paste.

Most off-the-shelf products help to relieve the pain but do not treat the underlying causes of ulcers.

If the ulcers do not go away after a few weeks to a month, and occur at the side of the tongue or the floor of the mouth, visit a dentist to rule out life-threatening conditions.

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