

Canker Sores (Aphthous Ulcers)

What are canker sores?

Canker sores are painful ulcers that appear on the mucous membranes inside the mouth. They can recur frequently and cause discomfort and pain while eating, swallowing and speaking. Canker sores are not contagious.

Symptoms and Identification

Canker sores typically manifest as small, round, or oval pale or yellowish ulcers on the mucous membranes inside the mouth, such as on the cheeks, lips, tongue, or gums.

Common symptoms include:

- An itching sensation before the sore appears
- Pain when touched
- A burning or stinging sensation
- Pain when eating, speaking or swallowing

What causes canker sores?

The exact cause of canker sores is not known, but they may be associated with several factors:

- Stress and fatigue
- Use of foaming toothpastes
- Certain gastrointestinal diseases and celiac disease
- Deficiencies in certain minerals and vitamins
- Certain foods and beverages (e.g. alcohol)
- Hormonal changes

Treatment and Self-Care

Canker sores usually heal on their own within 1 to 2 weeks. Larger, rare sores (> 1 cm) may take several weeks to heal. Treatment focuses on alleviating symptoms and speeding up the healing process:

- **Topical Treatment:** Canker sore symptoms can be relieved with chlorhexidine mouthwash and topical gels or sprays that form a protective layer over the ulcer.
- **Oral Hygiene:** Good oral hygiene can help prevent canker sores. Brush your teeth and gum lines thoroughly twice a day, and clean between your teeth at least once a day.
- **Topical Anesthetics:** For painful canker sores, topical anesthetics prescribed by a professional can help ease eating and speaking. Sometimes corticosteroid creams or gels are also used.

Additional Considerations

If canker sores recur frequently and several times a year, it is advisable to consult a doctor or dentist. Further investigation can help determine if an underlying chronic illness or current medication might be contributing to the problem.



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