

Thrush (Candidiasis)

Inflammation of the skin or mucous membranes (lining of the nose, mouth and genitals) usually caused by overgrowth of the yeast (a type of fungus) *Candida albicans*, though other species of *Candida* may also cause infections.

Thrush commonly occurs within the mouth in young infants, with symptoms of white spots or flakes that cannot be removed by gentle cleaning. It may also contribute to nappy rash. Thrush is also common in women, where it affects the vulva and vagina, causing itching and vaginal discharge. Some people develop candidiasis in folds of the skin, such as under the breasts, with the skin becoming red and very itchy.

Candidiasis is diagnosed by microscopic examination and growing the fungus from a scraping from the skin or mucous membranes.

Candida albicans is present in the bowel, mouth or vagina, or on the skin of a large proportion of healthy people. Babies are often infected at birth as they pass through the birth canal.

Often *Candida* is present and does not cause symptoms; however, it may multiply to the degree that it can cause symptoms requiring medical treatment. Some people are much more sensitive than others to the presence of even small numbers of these yeasts. Circumstances that encourage the overgrowth of *Candida* include:

- > hormonal changes (for example, pregnancy)
- > medication side effects, especially antibiotics
- > medical conditions such as diabetes
- > cancers and their treatment
- > HIV infection
- > the use of inhaled steroids for asthma.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Variable, 2 – 5 days in infants.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Carriers of *Candida* remain infectious to a variable degree, but most infections are caused by yeasts carried in the person's own body.

Treatment

Effective antifungal treatment is available from pharmacies or on prescription from a doctor.

Control of spread

- > Follow good hand washing techniques.
- > Exclusion from child care, preschool, school or work is not necessary.