

## Canker Sores (Mouth Ulcers)

### What are canker sores?

Canker sores are painful shallow ulcers (sores) in the lining of the mouth, usually on the inside of lips, inside of cheeks, and gums. Your child will not get a fever from a canker sore.

### What is the cause?

The exact cause of canker sores is not known. Some sores may result from prolonged contact with food that gets stuck in the teeth. Others may be due to forgotten injuries from toothbrushes, toothpicks, rough foods (such as corn chips), hot foods, or self-biting.

Herpes simplex causes recurrent fever blisters on the outer lip but does not cause recurrent canker sores on the inside of the mouth.

### How long will they last?

The white color of canker sores is the normal color of healing tissue in the mouth. The sores clear up in 1 to 2 weeks. Once they begin, no treatment can speed up the healing.

### How can I take care of my child?

- **Pain relief** To reduce the pain, your child can swish 1 teaspoon of liquid antacid in his or her mouth for several minutes. For very young children, put a half teaspoon of a liquid antacid (**Maalox**) directly on canker sores after meals. A child over age 4 with just one sore can put an antacid tablet on the sore and let it dissolve. Do this 3 or 4 times a day. Give acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) as needed for pain (especially at bedtime).
- **Diet** Offer a soft, bland diet to reduce the pain. Cold drinks and milkshakes are especially good. Avoid giving your child salty foods, citrus fruits, and foods that need a lot of chewing. Encourage your child to drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. For very young children, give fluids by cup rather than from a bottle because the nipple can increase the pain.
- **Prevention** Canker sores tend to recur in some people. Using a soft toothbrush and brushing after all meals may prevent some sores. Be careful with toothpicks and rough foods. Try to identify any foods that might be causing the ulcers. Were tomato, citrus fruit, peppermint, cinnamon, nuts, or shellfish eaten within the last day? If you find a food that you think may be causing the problem, don't let your child eat the food for 2 weeks and then offer it again to see whether your child gets canker sores from it. If the canker sores do come back, your child should never eat that food.

### When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call during office hours if:

- The pain becomes severe.
- Your child can't drink enough fluids.
- The sores last longer than 2 weeks.
- You feel your child is getting worse.

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