



Ulcers

Q What are the common causes of mouth ulcers?

A Usually a single mouth ulcer is due to damage caused by say biting the cheek or tongue, sharp teeth, tooth brushing or poorly fitting dentures. These ulcers are called 'traumatic ulcers'. If you have a number of mouth ulcers the usual cause is 'recurrent aphthous stomatitis'.

[Back to top](#)

Q What are the signs of recurrent aphthous stomatitis?

A Recurrent aphthous stomatitis is a common problem and leads to repeated bouts of mouth ulcers in otherwise healthy children and young people. The cause is not known, but it is not infectious and is unlikely to be inherited.

[Back to top](#)

Q Are there different types of recurrent mouth ulcers?

A Yes. • Minor ulcers are the most common. They can appear inside the cheeks, on the lips, tongue and gums and, more rarely, on the roof of the mouth. Most of these ulcers are the size of the top of a pencil and can sometimes come in clusters. You can get four to six at any one time. • Large ulcers are more severe and can last for five to ten weeks. They may appear near the tonsils and can be very painful, especially when swallowing. You usually only get one at a time. • It is also possible to have up to 100 very small painful ulcers which last for one to two weeks. However, these last two varieties are very rare. You may get ulcers in other parts of the body such as your eyes or genital area. It is important to tell your dentist about this.

[Back to top](#)

Q What types of treatment are there for mouth ulcers?

A The treatment depends on the cause of the ulcers. Sometimes all that is needed is for a sharp tooth to be smoothed down or a denture adjusted, although some patients may need a variety of mouthwashes or tablets.

[Back to top](#)

Q What should I do if I think I have mouth ulcers?

A If an ulcer lasts more than a few days you should always ask your dentist or doctor for advice. They may be able to tell you the cause and provide treatment, or they may arrange further tests or refer you to a specialist if necessary.

[Back to top](#)

Q How can I prevent mouth ulcers?

A You may be able to reduce the risk of mouth ulcers by: • maintaining good oral hygiene • using high-quality toothbrushes (to reduce the risk of damage to your mouth) • eating a good diet which is rich in vitamins A, C and E and which includes foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables (to lessen the risk of mouth cancer) • regularly visiting your dentist.

[Back to top](#)

Q **Should I worry about my ulcers?**

A Most ulcers heal up on their own. However, if they don't heal within three weeks you should visit your dentist. Your dentist will be able to examine your mouth to check that the problem is an ulcer and not something more serious such as mouth cancer. If you suffer from ulcers that come and go often, you should visit your dentist to check that there is not an underlying medical cause.
Back to top

Q **What are the less common causes of mouth ulcers?**

A Infections can cause mouth ulcers. Herpes simplex often leads to widespread mouth ulcers in children and some adults. Other less common viral and bacterial infections may cause mouth ulcers, but this is rare. Mouth ulcers can be caused by anaemia and occasionally by other blood disorders and some skin or gastrointestinal diseases. Sometimes the mouth ulcers are the only sign of an underlying disease.
Back to top

Q **Can cancer cause mouth ulcers?**

A Cancer of the mouth can first appear as a mouth ulcer. The ulcers caused by mouth cancer are usually single and last a long time without any obvious local cause (for example a sharp tooth). Any ulcer that lasts longer than three weeks should be looked at by your dentist. Ulcers caused by cancer usually appear on or under the tongue, but may occasionally appear somewhere else in the mouth. Cancer of the mouth is usually associated with heavy smoking and drinking. Doing both together greatly increases the risk.
Back to top

Q **Can I catch mouth ulcers?**

A Mouth ulcers cannot be caught by kissing or sharing drinks and utensils as they are not caused by an infection.
Back to top

Q **How do I know if I have a traumatic ulcer?**

A Traumatic ulcers are usually on their own, are next to the cause of the damage and go away once the source of the problem is removed.
Back to top

Q **What are mouth ulcers?**

A Ulcers are painful sores that appear inside the mouth. They are usually red or yellow. They are different from cold sores, which appear on the outer lips and are due to a virus.
Back to top



An ulcer on the lip