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## Oral Thrush

Thrush is a very common infection caused by yeast called *Candida* that causes irritation in and around the baby's mouth. Most infants naturally have the yeast *Candida albicans* in their mouths. Because their immune systems are not yet mature, the amount of yeast in their mouths can overgrow and lead to infection. It produces whitish or yellowish, irregularly shaped patches that coat the inside of the mouth and sometimes the tongue. The patches cannot be washed away or wiped off easily like milk. (If the only symptom is a uniformly white tongue, it is caused by milk residue, not thrush.)

Thrush occurs in both bottle-fed and breastfed babies in areas of the mouth irritated by prolonged sucking (as when baby sleeps with a bottle or pacifier) or a large pacifier or nipple. It can also occur when your child has recently been taking an antibiotic. It is not contagious.

### PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

There is not much you can do to prevent your infant from getting thrush. Although some cases will resolve without medical treatment, your child's doctor may prescribe an antifungal medication. Depending on the age of your child, the doctor may suggest the addition of yogurt with lactobacilli (live, active cultures) to your child's diet. The lactobacilli are "good" bacteria that can help control the yeast in your child's mouth.

**Restrict use of pacifier.** Eliminate the pacifier temporarily except when your child really needs it to go to sleep. Soak the pacifier and all nipples in hot tap water for 15 minutes, before giving them to your child. That way, if there is yeast on the bottle nipple or pacifier, your baby doesn't continue to get reinfected.

If the thrush recurs and your child is bottle-fed, switch to a nipple made from silicone or one with a different shape. Throw away and replace all nipples and pacifiers after your child is no longer infected. If eating and sucking are painful for your child, temporarily use a cup, a spoon, or a dropper.

If you are breastfeeding and your nipples are red and sore, there's a chance you may have a yeast infection on your nipples, and that you and the baby are passing it back and forth. If so, you may want to talk to your doctor about using an antifungal ointment on your nipples while the baby is being treated with the antifungal medication.

**Treating diaper rash associated with thrush.** If your baby has a diaper rash along with thrush, assume that the rash is caused by a yeast infection. Mix 1% hydrocortisone cream with clotrimazole cream (such as Lotrimin AF®) in equal parts and apply it to the rash 3 times a day for a week.

**Call our office during regular hours if:**

- Your child refuses to eat.
- The thrush gets worse with treatment.
- The thrush lasts longer than 10 days.
- Your child develops an unexplained fever over 100 degrees F (37.8 degrees C)
- You have other concerns or questions.

Sources:

“When your child has thrush” by Barton D. Schmitt, MD (September 1994)

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org) accessed 3/12/08