

Thrush and Yeast Infections

Answers To Your Questions

What is thrush?

- Thrush is a yeast (fungal) infection in the mouth that many babies get. It usually shows up as a white coating on the tongue or white patches inside the baby's cheeks or lips. Thrush may not appear until 2-3 weeks or more after birth.
- Thrush does not *usually* cause the baby to be sick or have a sore mouth, however, the yeast infection that causes thrush *can be passed from baby to mother during breastfeeding*. This can cause the mother to have a yeast infection of her nipples or breasts and can lead to nipple or breast pain.
- If the baby has a white-coated tongue but mother has no nipple or breast pain *and* baby is nursing well, treatment may not be necessary.
- Sometimes mother will have symptoms of a yeast infection in the nipple or breast but the baby will not have any white patches in his or her mouth.

What causes thrush?

- Thrush is caused by *Candida albicans*. This yeast (fungus) is found in every person's body and normally causes no harm, however, it can sometimes grow very rapidly and cause an *infection*. Most often babies come into contact with yeast in the birth canal during delivery.
- It is more likely that a baby will get a yeast infection if the mother or baby has been taking antibiotics. Antibiotics kill bacteria but allow yeast to grow rapidly.

How will I know if my baby has thrush?

Your baby may

- have white patches on the tongue or inside the cheeks or lips
- have a diaper rash which is quite red and may peel
- repeatedly pull off the breast, make a clicking sound when nursing, or refuse the breast
- become gassy or fussy

Important: You may not *see* any signs of the infection.

How will I know if I have a nipple or breast yeast infection?

You may have

- considerable pain in your nipple(s) or breast(s) that
 - is burning, itching or shooting (into your armpit, shoulder or back)
 - lasts throughout the feeding or between feedings
 - begins after a period of pain-free breastfeeding
- itchy, pink, shiny or cracked nipples
- a vaginal yeast infection

Don't go by looks, go by how you feel! Often nipples and breasts with a yeast infection appear normal, but they can be very painful. If you and your baby have been doing well with breastfeeding and you begin to have pain during or after feedings there is a good chance you have a yeast infection. If you do, *both mother and baby must be treated*, at the same time!

What should I do?

- Read about thrush and yeast infection treatment recommendations, and take this information with you when you go to see your doctor.
- Sterilize all items that come in contact with baby's mouth (e.g. pacifiers, nipples, teething rings) by washing them in hot, soapy water, rinsing, and then boiling in a covered pot for five minutes.
- Sterilize breast pump parts (that can be boiled) as suggested above.
- Change breast pads at *every* feeding. Wash reusable cloth breast pads and bras in hot, soapy water; hang in the sun to dry, when possible.
- Wash your hands after you change baby's diaper and after you use the toilet.
- Ask your public health nurse about stored breast milk, and for more helpful tips.

Where can I get information about treating thrush and yeast infections?

Jack Newman, MD, FRCPC, is a Toronto paediatrician and breastfeeding expert who has a great deal of experience treating yeast infections in mothers and babies. Dr. Newman's handouts are available online at www.breastfeedingonline.com, or through your public health nurse. Contact him by email at drjacknewman@sympatico.ca or by phone at (416) 813-5757 (option 3). **For more information and support about breastfeeding, and referral to other breastfeeding resources, contact a public health nurse at the Simcoe County District Health Unit.**

