

ODA PATIENT'S PAGE

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Canker Sores

Canker sores (aphthous ulcers or recurrent aphthous stomatitis) are painful mouth ulcers that usually appear after a gradual burning or tingling sensation. Canker sores are usually found on the movable, non-keratinized (less protected) tissues in the mouth, including the inner surface of the lips, the cheeks, under the tongue, and in the back of the throat. You may remember the first time you experienced a canker sore and looked in your mouth to find a small (2-4 millimeter) white or yellow ulcer with a red halo around it.

Canker sores occur in women more often than men. They may occur at any age, but usually first appear between the ages of 10 and 40. They also can run in families. They may be linked to problems with the body's immune (defense) system. The sores may occur after a mouth injury due to dental work, aggressive tooth cleaning, or biting the tongue or cheek. Canker sores can be triggered by emotional stress, dietary deficiencies (especially iron, folic acid, or Vitamin B-12), menstrual periods, hormonal changes, food allergies, and similar situations. They occur most commonly with viral infections. In some cases, the cause cannot be identified.

Canker sores usually cause pain for about four or five days, and generally completely resolve in 10-14 days. The cause of canker sores is unknown, but some researchers have speculated that there may be an inherited predisposition or defect in the immune system responsible for them.

If you have a canker sore, you should not eat hot or spicy foods, which can cause pain. Mild, over-the-counter mouth washes or salt water may help. There are over-the-counter medicines that soothe the painful area. These medicines are applied directly to the sore area of the mouth. To prevent bacterial infection, brush and floss your teeth regularly and visit the dentist for routine care.



To speed up healing, try mixing one part hydrogen peroxide and one part water and apply it to the canker sore with a cotton swab. Then dab a small amount of milk of magnesia on the area 3 - 4 times a day. This also helps relieve discomfort.