

Mouth Ulcers

What are they?

An ulcer is a hole in the lining (mucosa) of the mouth. They can affect the cheeks, tongue, gums, lips and roof of the mouth (palate). They are often painful and make eating and speaking difficult.

What causes them?

SINGLE ULCERS can be caused by damage to the mucosa for example: -

- Scratches from sharp food or broken teeth.
- Burns from hot foods.
- Chemical burns i.e. from aspirin held on the gum for toothache.
- Viruses such as cold sores and shingles.

These tend to heal quickly over about a week, without leaving a mark.

A single ulcer, which lasts for more than 10 days, should be checked by your dentist. In most cases there is an obvious cause such as a broken tooth. Once the cause is removed the ulcer will normally heal.

Any ulcer without an obvious cause, lasting more than 4 weeks, should be investigated further. This is to exclude possible cancer.

Most ulcers are not malignant and this is merely a precaution.

RECURRENT ULCERS.

These Aphthous ulcers tend to come and go again and again. They may be due to a lack of certain vitamins in the blood. These include iron, folic acid and Vitamin B12. This is common in children who are growing very quickly.

They can also be due to some medical conditions such as gluten sensitivity. In most cases we cannot find a cause for them. They are divided into three types: -

1. Minor Aphthae

These are small, about 3-5mm wide and are the most common type. They come in groups of about 6, lasting up to 7 days. Most are at the front of the teeth, i.e. the lips, tongue and gums. They heal without leaving a mark.

2. Major Aphthae

These are larger, about 1cm wide and are much less common. They usually come one at a time and can last several weeks. Most are at the back of the tongue, palate or tonsil area. They heal slowly and leave a scar.

3. Herpetiform Ulcers

These are very uncommon and are tiny, about 1mm wide. They heal in a few days without a scar. Dozens can come up at one time anywhere in the mouth.