

Breastfeeding and Thrush

What is thrush?

Thrush is a yeast (fungus) infection that can affect mother, baby and her partner. If you develop thrush, it is more likely to happen several weeks after your baby is born, but can develop as early as two weeks after birth. Yeast is always present in our bodies, but too much can cause infection which must be treated.

What causes thrush?

The germ that causes thrush grows well in warm, moist, dark places, such as in your baby's mouth or diaper area, in your milk ducts, on your nipples or in your vagina. The infection can pass back and forth between you and your baby. Thrush is more likely to happen when you or your baby have been on an antibiotic, and when you have sore or cracked nipples.



What are the signs?

Mother's nipples may look normal but still feel sore.

Mothers may have:

- ◆ sudden onset of breast or nipple soreness when breastfeeding had been going well (pain-free)
- ◆ nipple pain that does not improve even with better position and latching-on techniques
- ◆ cracked nipples that do not heal; fine cracks (like paper cuts) at the base of the nipple
- ◆ itchy or burning nipples and areolae (the brown or dark skin around the nipple) that may look pink, red, shiny or flaky
- ◆ sharp, shooting pain in the breasts during feedings and possibly between feedings
- ◆ achy breasts and a painful let-down of milk
- ◆ thick, white vaginal discharge with redness, itchiness and burning in the vagina

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Some babies with thrush have no signs or symptoms at all.

Your baby may have:

- ◆ white patches on the inside of his mouth, cheeks, or tongue that do not wipe off
- ◆ a change in temperament, (e.g., has more gassy or cranky periods)
- ◆ periods where he refuses the breast or pulls off the breast during feeding
- ◆ a clicking noise during sucking
- ◆ bright red diaper rash with a well-marked border, that does not improve with regular diaper cream

What can I do?

- ◆ Talk with your health care provider if you think you or your baby has thrush. Once you start the prescribed treatment, you may see improvement in a day or two. However, you both need to be treated for at least two weeks. A good rule of thumb is to have seven days of pain-free nursing before you stop the treatment. Your partner also needs to be treated with a prescribed medication if you have a vaginal yeast infection.
- ◆ Continue to breastfeed your baby. Always check to make sure your baby has a deep latch.
- ◆ Try breastfeeding more often but for shorter periods. Start with the least sore breast.
- ◆ Keep your medication and your baby's medication separate.
- ◆ Using a clean swab each time, paint the inside of baby's mouth (cheek, gums, tongue and roof), with the medicine your doctor prescribed after each breastfeeding. The germ that causes thrush grows very quickly, about every 2-3 hours, so you need to treat both you and your baby after each feeding.
- ◆ Pay special attention to personal cleanliness, because the infection may also be present in your vagina. Remember to wash your hands well, especially after changing your baby's diaper, after using the washroom, before feeding your baby and before meals.
- ◆ Change your nursing pads at each feeding. Throw away disposable ones. Wash cloth ones in hot, soapy water and dry in a dryer at a hot setting before using again.
- ◆ Rinse your nipples and areolae with a vinegar and water solution (one tablespoon of vinegar to one cup of water) after each feeding. Air dry. Mix up a new solution every day.
- ◆ Put the cream prescribed by your health care provider on your nipple and areola of both breasts after each feeding. Gently massage the cream into your nipples. Do not remove the cream before breastfeeding.
- ◆ The milk that you express during a thrush infection can be used but not frozen.
- ◆ Each day, boil for 20 minutes any items that come into contact with your baby's mouth, such as medicine droppers, spoons, pacifiers, pump parts, toys etc. Toys that cannot be boiled should be washed well with hot soapy water.
- ◆ Wash all of your bras, pads, nightgowns or other clothing that comes in contact with your nipples. Use hot water and bleach. Dry at a hot setting in the dryer or in the sun.
- ◆ Keep baby's diaper area clean and dry. Put the cream on your baby's diaper area during each changing.
- ◆ Gentian violet (1% solution in water) is an effective and cheap way to treat thrush. Talk to your health care provider about how you can use this treatment properly.
- ◆ Talk with your public health nurse, lactation consultant or doctor if you need more help. You may need to be treated more than once and/or try different anti-fungal medications. Infections that don't go away may need to be treated with an oral medication.