

Family Education Sheet

Thrush, Yeast and Breastfeeding



Boston Children's Hospital

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This sheet explains the common infection called thrush, caused by a yeast infection.

Key points

- Thrush spreads very easily.
- When the infection passes between a nursing mother and baby, just 1 of you may have symptoms, but both of you need treatment.
- Breastfeeding or using breastmilk pumped during a yeast infection is safe for your baby.

What is thrush?

- Thrush is an infection in the mouth. A type of yeast called *Candida albicans* causes it.
- Thrush looks like white patches on the inside of the mouth and gums. It may coat the tongue and look like milk or formula. Thrush doesn't rinse off. It can make feeding painful, so your baby might refuse to breastfeed or take a bottle.
- Thrush can cause diaper rashes in babies and vaginal yeast infections in mothers. Yeast spreads very easily, so you and your baby may have rashes and/or yeast infections in more than 1 place.
- The infection may pass back-and-forth between the baby's mouth and your nipples.
- Yeast can make your nipples feel itchy, sore or burn. They may look bright pink to red or have a rash. The skin of the areola and nipple may look shiny or flaky. You may feel shooting pain in your breasts during or after a feeding.

What causes a yeast infection or thrush?

Candida albicans live in the mouth, vagina and intestines and is usually harmless. Sometimes infections happen because the body grows too much yeast. This can happen:

- After a mother or baby is treated with antibiotics for a different infection
- When the skin stays moist and warm, like in a damp bra, bathing suit or wet diaper
- Hormonal changes and some medication, like steroids or birth control pills
- Eating too many sweets or dairy products
- Contact with someone who has a yeast infection
- Not changing wet breast pads often enough

Are treat thrush and yeast infections treated?

- When a yeast infection passes between a nursing mother and baby, just 1 of you may have symptoms. **It is important for both you and your baby to get treated together.**
- There are different types of treatments depending on where the yeast infection is.
- Yeast infections come back easily. **You must use medicines or creams for 7 days (or as told by your doctor or nurse practitioner) even if the infection seems to be gone.**

Always take medications exactly as told by your doctor or nurse. Follow the directions on the package or prescription label carefully and ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain any part you do not understand. Talk with your doctor about any allergies you or your child may have.

What are the types of yeast infections and treatments?

- **Deep breast pain:** You may need to take oral (by mouth) anti-fungal medication, such as Diflucan (fluconazole).
- **Nipple thrush:** You may need to use a combination of antibiotics and anti-fungal and steroid creams. Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner.
- **Oral thrush:** Your child's doctor or nurse practitioner might give you a prescription for Nystatin. This is a liquid medicine to use in your baby's mouth.
- **Vaginitis:** Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner for treatment suggestions.
- **Yeast diaper rash:** Use an anti-fungal cream or ointment. Put it on your child's diaper area when it is clean and dry.
- **Yeast on the breast or nipples:** Use an over-the-counter anti-fungal cream like Miconazole 2%. You can also use liquid Nystatin, Nystatin ointment and Gentian Violet.

When using creams, be sure to wipe them off your body before feeding your baby.

Important tips

- 1 **Wash your hands well** with hot soapy water. Dry them with paper towels.
- 2 **Boil pacifiers, bottle nipples or toys that your baby puts in his or her mouth.** Boil for 10 minutes or put through the dishwasher on a high heat cycle. You can also use microwave steam bags.
 - a. **If you can't clean these items using 1 of these methods, throw them out.** Yeast can live on them and cause the infection to come back.
- 3 **Don't use baby wipes.** Use a clean washcloth or soft paper towels with warm water with each diaper change. Pat the skin dry or allow your baby's bottom to air-dry before using creams.
- 4 **Don't use rubber pants or plastic back diaper covers.** Wash cloth diapers in very hot water with bleach, rinse with vinegar and dry in a hot dryer or the sun.
- 5 **Rinse your nipples with clean water after breastfeeding.** Pat dry or air-dry them before using cream or liquid medicine. Or mix 1 Tbsp. vinegar with 1 cup water. Dip a clean cotton ball into it and put it on your nipples. Then air dry before putting on medicine.
- 6 **Do not use bra pads with plastic liners.** Change bra pads a lot to keep your nipples dry.
- 7 **Change bras and use fresh towels for bathing every day.** Wash laundry in very hot water with bleach. Add vinegar to the rinse cycle. Dry on a high dryer setting. You can also boil bras for 10 minutes to kill yeast.
- 8 **Once a day, sterilize breast pump parts, nipples shields and anything that comes in contact with the nipples or breastmilk.** You can boil them for 10 minutes or use the dishwasher. If you are in the hospital, you can use microwave steam bags to sterilize the equipment.
- 9 **Diet changes may help yeast from coming back.** Eat less sugar, dairy products and alcohol. Garlic and Acidophilus supplements may help prevent yeast infections. Talk with your health care provider for more information.
- 10 **Breastfeeding or using breastmilk pumped during a yeast infection is safe for your baby.** Do not save expressed milk. Instead, feed it to your baby the same day and throw out any leftovers.
- 11 **Refrigerating and freezing milk does not kill yeast.** If you use the milk after the infection is gone, the milk could cause the infection to come back.

Contact us

If your or your baby's symptoms do not get better after 3 days of treatment, or if your baby is having problems feeding, contact your health care provider or Boston Children's Lactation Support Program at 617-355-0005.

This Family Education Sheet is available in Arabic and [Spanish](#).

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