

CANKER SORES (APHTHOUS ULCERS)

Canker sores are common. They develop suddenly on the tongue, sides of the mouth, or gums and result from destruction of the protective lining of the mouth. You can recognize a canker sore; it is raw and open with a whitish yellow base. Contact with acidic, spicy, or salty foods may be painful.

It is not known why people get canker sores. Heredity may play a part, since canker sores often run in families. Occasionally, certain foods, may trigger an attack of canker sores. Most canker sores appear without known reason. Canker sores are usually a small, occasional nuisance. Rarely, some persons tend to get large, painful sores, which may occur frequently.

Canker sores are *not* contagious and are *not* caused by bacteria or viruses ("germs").

Unfortunately, there is no cure for canker sores. Based on your individual case I will recommend the best treatment. Small sores often clear in 1 week or less and can be ignored. For a new or painful sore, I may prescribe a strong cortisone ointment. Applying it to the sore six or seven times a day may speed healing and lessen pain. The cortisone ointment must be started early to prevent enlargement of the canker sore and should be used for only a few days. Applying the cortisone ointment longer may interfere with healing.

If your sore is very large and painful, I may inject cortisone into the base of the sore to provide immediate relief from pain and speed healing. When several painful canker sores occur at one time, I may prescribe prednisone by mouth to be taken for 2 or 3 days. This treatment is safe, and the dosage of prednisone does not have to be tapered. Certain prescription mouthwashes may be effective against canker sores. At the first sign of a sore, swish 1 teaspoon of this prescription around your mouth for 4 to 5 minutes, and then spit it out. Do this four times per day. This mouthwash treatment may be continued till all your symptoms subside. There is no harm if you accidentally swallow some of the mouthwash.

Most persons get prompt relief from canker sores by applying medicines directly to the sores. For the occasional person who suffers from frequent attacks of large, painful canker sores, both medicines taken by mouth and local treatment are usually needed to provide relief.