

## What is thrush?

**T**hrush is a common yeast infection (also called *Candida albicans* or Monilia) that affects the mucous membranes. It can occur when the mother or infant has been treated with antibiotics or can be contracted by the baby at the time of birth if the mother has a vaginal yeast infection.

Thrush is often found in infants, pregnant women or diabetic patients. It is easily spread from one person to another.

When a breastfeeding mother complains of the sudden onset of sore nipples after a period of "normal" nursing, thrush may be the cause. The mother may also complain of shooting pains in the breast during or after a feeding or of itchy, burning or tender nipples. Her breast may also appear to be red or bright pink.

The baby may have a diaper rash or white patches on the inside of the mouth, gums or tongue. Sometimes, a baby may refuse to nurse or may pull off the breast. In rare cases, feedings may be interrupted because of the infant's discomfort and could result in inadequate weight gain. While this in itself is not a symptom of thrush, it could be a consideration in a slow-gaining situation.

Thrush is not a serious condition; breastfeeding can and should continue during treatment. Thrush can persist for several weeks or longer, and may reoccur sporadically. Both mother and baby need to be treated, and in the case of a vaginal infection, the mother's sexual partner may also need treatment. If a yeast-caused diaper rash is present, it can be treated with an anti-fungal ointment. It is possible for the organism that causes thrush to be present without visible symptoms.

Usually an oral medication is given to the baby through a dropper and applied directly to the patches on the inside of the mouth. The medication is most effective when kept in the mouth for as long as possible before swallowing. An antifungal cream is used on the mother's nipples applied after each nursing.

It is necessary to continue using the medication for as long as prescribed, even if symptoms are no longer apparent. In frequently recurring cases, an oral antifungal medication in tablet or liquid form is also prescribed for the mother.

### Suggestions for the management of thrush

#### Mother:

- Hands should be washed after using the bathroom and after each diaper change. All family members who change diapers or feed the baby should follow these guidelines also.
- Hands should be washed before touching or handling the breasts and before nursing the baby.
- Nipples should be rinsed after each nursing with clear water and air dried. The organism that causes thrush thrives on milk and moisture.
- When antibiotics are used, they kill "good" bacteria along with the bacteria which causes the illness. The loss of these bacteria can allow the normal yeast present in the body to overgrow. Sometimes the addition of a dietary supplement such as cottage cheese or yogurt can help to replace the "good" bacteria in the intestinal tract.
- If a breast pump or breast shells is used, all parts that touch the milk should be boiled daily. Disposable nursing pads should be discarded after each feeding. Cloth nursing pads should be changed after each feeding. They should not be reused until they have been washed with hot soapy water.
- Milk expressed during an outbreak of thrush should not be saved or frozen. Freezing may not kill the organism and the baby could be reinfected later from a bottle of stored milk.
- Dietary changes especially reducing sugar intake and yeast-containing foods can reduce the reoccurrence of yeast infections.

#### Baby:

- Anything that goes into the baby's mouth, such as teething toys, pacifiers or bottle nipples should be boiled or put through the dishwasher. If that is not possible, then they should be discarded. These items can harbor the yeast fungus and continue to reinfest the baby.
- If the baby has a diaper rash, keep the diaper area clean and dry. Rinse the diaper area at each change with clear

water. Let the baby's bottom air-dry several times a day if possible. Use an appropriate anti-fungal cream.

- Plastic pants or disposable diapers can aggravate the condition. If using cloth diapers, they can be treated by rinsing with boiling water and adding a cup of vinegar to the final rinse. Commercial diaper services will add an extra rinse, if requested.
- If baby is being given medication with an eyedropper, the dropper should be washed with hot soapy water before replacing it in the bottle.

The presence of thrush can cause sore nipples but the following suggestions can help make nursing less painful.

- Shorter, more frequent feedings can be offered. This ensures that baby is not ravenously hungry and is less likely to latch-on vigorously.
- Nursing can begin on the least sore side and switched to the other breast after a let-down has occurred.
- The baby needs to be positioned correctly at the breast. Break suction before taking him off the breast by pressing a clean finger at the corner of the baby's mouth.
- An ice cube wrapped in clean cloth can be applied to the nipple prior to nursing to numb the pain.

### ***Breast pump care***

If a breastfeeding mother or her baby have contracted thrush, any pump attachments that come in contact with her milk must be cleaned after each use and sterilized at least once per day.

#### *Cleaning Instructions:*

Ameda/Egnell pump parts may be cleaned by placing them in the upper compartment of a dishwasher or hand washing in hot soapy water and rinsing with hot clean water. (Soap should not be put directly into the tubing, as it will be difficult to rinse out completely.) All small flexible parts (such as the gasket and the overflow bottle) should be hand washed separately to prevent their loss and extend the life of the parts.

Parts can be air-dried on a clean towel or rack. If they will not be used for several hours, they should be covered with a clean towel.

#### *Sterilizing instructions:*

Disassemble all parts and immerse in boiling water for 20 minutes. Carefully line the bottom of the pan with padding, such as a washcloth, dish towel or diaper. This prevents the melting of any pump parts should the pot boil dry. Allow the water to cool; drain parts carefully before using.

It is only necessary to wash the tubing when milk has overflowed into it. When sterilizing, the tubing should be filled with water before immersion in boiling water. If possible, hang to dry so that water drains out of the tubing. *Do not attach tubing to the pump until the tubing is dry.*

