

## COPING WITH MINOR APHTHOUS ULCERS

Minor aphthous ulcers are small painful sores that occur on the inside of the lips and cheeks, or below the tongue. They look pale yellow with a red margin and are the most common type of mouth ulcer. One ulcer may develop, but up to five may appear at the same time. Some people feel an itching in parts of the mouth for a day or so before the ulcer appears. Each bout of ulcers last 7 to 10 days and then goes without the need for treatment. However, they tend to return from time to time.

### What causes minor aphthous ulcers?

In most cases aphthous ulcers develop for no apparent reason and there is no cure. They occur most commonly in childhood and tend to return less often as you become older. Some of the factors that may trigger ulcers include:

- Emotional stress and lack of sleep.
- Mechanical injury from a harsh toothbrush or biting the cheek.
- Sensitivity to certain foods (including chocolate) or to chemicals in toothpastes.
- Hormonal changes: many women get ulcers at the time of their period.
- Nutritional deficiencies: particularly a lack of iron, folic acid and vitamin B12
- Genetic factor: mouth ulcers run in some families.

### General Advice

- Ask your dentist to adjust any teeth that feel sharp and to polish any fillings that feel rough.
- Use a very soft tooth brush and Corsodyl gel when your mouth is sore.
- Eat a nutritious well-balanced diet.
- Avoid or try to reduce anything that triggers off your mouth ulcers, for example:
  - Stress, anxiety or lack of sleep
  - Spicy foods, acidic fruit drinks and very salty food (such as crisps)
  - Toothpastes with sodium lauryl sulphate or with strong flavourings.

### Oral Hygiene

- Clean teeth and gums thoroughly twice a day with a small brush and a mild fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth with floss, tape or interdental brushes.
- Use Difflam – benzydamine 0.15%, as a painkilling rinse.
- Use Corsodyl – chlorhexidine 0.2%, as an antiseptic rinse.

### Mild steroid lozenges or gels

- You can buy small quantities of Corlan pellets (lozenges) or Adcortyl in Orabase cream (gels) from a pharmacy. If used early, as soon as you feel the ulcer coming, these medications may prevent the ulcer from erupting fully. Used 4 times a day, they may help the ulcer to heal faster and so reduce the pain. They are safe to use provided they are not swallowed.
- Bonjela gel applied directly to the ulcer 4 times a day can help with pain relief (**not to be used by under 16s**)

### Important – See your dentist or doctor

- If, in addition to the mouth ulcers, you have other symptoms in your mouth or ulcers elsewhere.
- If an ulcer lasts for more than 3 weeks without healing as this could be something sinister such as early oral cancer called squamous cell carcinoma.