

Maxillofacial Unit

Burning Mouth Syndrome

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of any forthcoming treatment and contains answers to many of the commonly asked questions. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask.

What is burning mouth syndrome?

Burning mouth syndrome is a name given to discomfort or pain in the mouth. It often affects the tongue, lips and cheeks but other parts of the skin lining inside the mouth can also feel uncomfortable. Most people with the condition complain of a burning or scalded feeling.

Burning mouth syndrome is a common condition. It often affects women, particularly after the menopause, but men can sometimes get it too. Up to one in three older women report noticing a burning sensation in their mouth.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Moderate to severe burning in the mouth is the main symptom and can persist for months or years. For many people, the burning sensation begins in late morning, builds to a peak by evening, and often subsides at night. Other symptoms can include:

- Tingling or numbness on the tip of the tongue or in the mouth.
- Bitter or metallic changes in taste.
- Dry or sore mouth.

What is the cause?

The sensation of burning in the mouth can result from a range of medical or dental problems including:

- Hormonal changes around the menopause.
 - Dry mouth, which can be caused by many medicines and disorders such as Sjögren's syndrome or diabetes.
 - Oral candidiasis, a fungal infection in the mouth.
 - Acid reflux (heartburn).
 - Poorly-fitting dentures or allergies to denture materials.
 - Blood or vitamin deficiencies.
- It can also occur or get worse when somebody is stressed, anxious or depressed, or going through a difficult time of life. Not knowing why your mouth is burning can also make you anxious.

How is it diagnosed?

A review of your medical history, a thorough oral examination, and a general examination may help identify the source of your burning mouth. Tests may include:

- Blood tests to look for infection, nutritional deficiencies, and disorders associated with BMS such as diabetes or thyroid problems.
- Oral swab/rinse to check for thrush (only if necessary).
- Commonly, nothing unusual is found. **There is often no identifiable cause.**

How is it treated?

Treatment will be tailored to your individual needs. If there is a cause for your symptoms, possible treatments may include:

- Adjusting or replacing irritating dentures
- Treating existing disorders such as diabetes, Sjögren's syndrome, or a thyroid problem to improve burning mouth symptoms
- Recommending supplements for nutritional deficiencies
- Switching medicine, where possible, if a drug you are taking is causing your burning mouth
- Prescribing medications to:
 - Relieve dry mouth
 - Treat oral candidiasis
 - Help control pain from nerve damage
 - Relieve anxiety and depression.

When no underlying cause can be found, treatment is aimed at the symptoms to try to reduce the pain associated with burning mouth syndrome.

Hormone replacement therapy hasn't been shown to improve the symptoms, and neither have vitamin supplements if your blood tests are normal.

Symptoms often improve following reassurance that there is no serious disease present in the mouth. The burning feelings can sometimes be worse at times of stress and go away when life is running more smoothly.

In the same way that low doses of antidepressants can help patients with neuralgia even if they are not depressed, sometimes low doses of antidepressants can relieve the symptoms of burning mouth syndrome. However, there are significant side effects associated with these medications including dizziness and daytime drowsiness.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy can also be of benefit in some cases.

What if I don't get better?

We know that we can't always make you better. Trying not to focus on the feeling, learning to live with the sensation, and remembering that no serious disease has been found can sometimes be the best way of managing this common problem.

Follow up is not usually required for this condition and we would recommend a regular check up by your dentist to monitor the condition.

Helpful Tips

You can also try these self-care tips to help ease the pain of burning mouth syndrome.

- Sip water frequently.
- Suck on ice chips.
- Avoid irritating substances like hot, spicy foods; mouthwashes that contain alcohol; and products high in acid, like citrus fruits and juices.
- Chew sugar-free gum.
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco products.

This leaflet is specific to the practice of Oral and Maxillo-Facial Surgery in the United Kingdom and is in addition to the generic guidance given in the GMC publications of Good Medical and Surgical Practice 2001 & 2002.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

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If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

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