
a series of fact sheets written
by experts in the field of liver
disease

Side Effect Management:

Mouth Sores

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During HCV treatment, some patients complain of mouth soreness. This may include redness or tenderness, along with sores or ulcers on the gums, cheeks, and tongue. This fact sheet discusses mouth problems along with management tips.

Talk to Your Doctor

There are many types and causes of mouth sores. *Canker sores*, or *aphthous ulcers*, are most often the mouth sores that occur during treatment. Before treating mouth sores, it is recommended that you consult your health care practitioner in order to obtain a proper diagnosis. Since there are many factors that can cause mouth sores, it is important to understand what caused the problem before it can be fixed.

How do you cure canker sores? The answer is you probably can't. There are remedies that can make them less painful or hasten the healing, but like the common cold, there is no reliable cure for common canker sores. The exception to this is if your particular variety of canker sores is caused by an underlying condition that can be changed. Canker sores that are associated with food sensitivities, medications, nutritional deficiencies or the use of sodium lauryl sulfate will heal once these conditions are resolved.

Some Suggestions

There are some home remedies you can try. Talk to your medical provider about these suggestions, particularly prior to using any herbs or supplements. Here are some tips:

- Maintain oral hygiene. Be gentle with tooth brushing, but don't skip this.
- Avoid sodium lauryl sulfate in dental products.
- Drink lots of water. Adequate hydration is important for health maintenance, particularly during HCV treatment.
- Do not drink liquids that are excessively hot. Ice or frozen juice bars may soothe mouth sores.
- Try over-the-counter (OTC) products that numb canker sores. Products that contain benzocaine, benzoin tincture, lidocaine, camphor, or phenol can provide temporary relief from the pain of mouth sores. Orabase® and Zilactac-B® are two examples of OTC products used for mouth sores.
- Apply a protective barrier to the lesion. There are OTC products that form a film to cover mouth lesions, making them less vulnerable to irritation.
- Maintain good nutrition by eating well. You may want to discuss with your doctor if you should take a multivitamin or other dietary supplement. Some people suck on zinc lozenges, but there is no data to support their effectiveness.
- Avoid hard, crunchy, spicy, salty, or acidic foods.
- Reduce stress; practice relaxation techniques, such as meditation or yoga.
- Keep a food diary to see if a particular food is the cause of mouth sores. Try eliminating suspected foods.
- Swish, then spit or swallow a teaspoonful of an antacid such as milk of magnesia (magnesium hydroxide) or Mylanta® (aluminum and magnesium hydroxides) with a teaspoonful of liquid Benedryl® (diphenhydramine) four to six times daily.
- Try tea. Black and some herbal teas are high in tannin. A "used" tea bag placed on a canker sore may provide relief.

- Consider taking anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen. Be careful because this medication can be the cause of aphthous ulcers and not everyone can or should take ibuprofen.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may help to reduce pain. Do not exceed recommended dosages.
- Infuse sage and chamomile in water. Use as a mouthwash four to six times daily.
- Echinacea may speed healing but should not be used during HCV treatment, if you are HIV-positive, or if you have an autoimmune disease.
- Try taking lactobacillus. This harmless bacteria is part of the natural intestinal flora and is sometimes called a probiotic. There are many brands of lactobacillus, such as Lactinex®. Although relatively safe, it is not recommended if you have a prosthetic heart valve or valvular heart disease, asthma or allergic to dairy products or are pregnant, trying to get pregnant or breast-feeding.
- Lysine may be beneficial for herpes-related mouth sores but are unlikely to help canker sores. 500 mg one to three times daily is the general recommendation.
- Other tips may be found at MedlinePlus <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003059.htm>

Medication

If nonprescription remedies don't provide sufficient relief, talk to your doctor about prescription drugs. Depending on your particular condition, there are a number of different prescription choices. Your doctor may prescribe a chlorhexidine rinse or a solution of viscous lidocaine, magnesium hydroxide antacid, and diphenhydramine. These may be swished and either swallowed or spit out, depending on the instructions. Various corticosteroid rinses are available, depending on the severity of the sores.

Viscous lidocaine can be prescribed alone and applied to mouth sores for temporary relief. If your doctor prescribes a medication that needs to be applied directly to the canker sore, do the following: Dry the sore by

gently dabbing the sore with a tissue. Put the medicine on a clean cotton swab and dab the sore with the swab. Do not eat or drink until the medication has had a chance to dry and form a barrier. Use all medicine for the length of time your doctor advises.

Mouth sores can be agonizing and can interfere with eating and quality of life. Do not ignore mouth ulcerations that are very painful, large, recur, do not heal, or appear in clusters. To the outside eye, canker sores may not appear to be a big deal, but those who have suffered through them know just how painful mouth sores can be. Those who acquire mouth sores during HCV therapy can have an especially hard time. Reducing pain and controlling recurrences can help immensely and improve quality of life.



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