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RECURRENT ORAL ULCERATION

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 recurrent oral ulceration?

Recurrent oral ulceration is a term used to describe small mouth ulcers which typically last a few days but come back every few weeks or months. Typically they affect the tongue, lips and cheeks, but any part of the mouth can get ulcers. They are very common, often starting in childhood. About two in every three people will have been affected with recurrent oral ulceration at some time in their lives.

What causes them?

Although the cause of the most common type of recurrent oral ulceration is unknown there are lots of reasons why people can get other types of ulcers in their mouths. Some ulcers can be related to low levels of iron or vitamins in the blood. Rarely ulcers can be associated with skin or stomach problems.

How can I tell whether my mouth ulcers are related to another problem?

Your doctor will ask you about your general health and ask you questions about whether you have noticed any problems with your skin or stomach. You will also be asked if you have noticed ulcers anywhere else on your body.

If you have mouth ulcers blood tests are usually taken to check if they are the result of another medical condition. However the majority of people with mouth ulcers have completely normal blood tests.

Is there any treatment for the mouth ulcers?

Because mouth ulcers are so common their treatment has been studied by lots of scientists. There are a wide variety of treatments available all of which probably make the ulcers go away more quickly and feel less painful but do not prevent the next crop of ulcers from occurring. Mouthwashes (eg Corsodyl, Difflam) can be used. Similarly weak steroids in the form of pastes, dissolving tablets or mouthwashes can sometimes help.

Are mouth ulcers dangerous?

No. They are not infectious and cannot be passed on to others.

Will I get better?

Recurrent oral ulceration often gets better with age. We are not sure why but people often grow out of mouth ulcers by their 30s or 40s. However they can disappear sooner or carry on for longer in some people.