



Student Health Center

UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: APHTHOUS ULCERS

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed aphthous ulcers, also known as canker sores. Aphthous ulcers are small, painful sores that occur inside the mouth. The sores begin as tiny, red swellings, then turn into grayish-white, shallow ulcers with a red halo border. They appear inside the mouth on the inner cheeks or lips, gums, tongue, roof of the mouth, or throat.

Outbreaks often begin in adolescence. They tend to be recurrent.

The cause of aphthous ulcers is unknown. A tendency to develop the sores runs in some families. Stress may precipitate an outbreak, as well as trauma to the inside of the mouth (biting the lip, blow to the mouth). Occasionally, aphthous ulcers are associated with a deficiency of iron, folate, or vitamin B12.

Most outbreaks of aphthous ulcers last one to two weeks.

Aphthous ulcers are rarely a serious problem in normal, healthy people. They are more of a nuisance. Treatment is aimed at reducing the pain and duration of attacks. No cure is available.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR APHTHOUS ULCERS:

- 1- Avoid irritating drinks and foods while the outbreak is active. Spicy foods and citrus juices can irritate the sores.
- 2- Cool liquids (slushees, milk shakes, iced drinks), may be soothing. Drinking through a straw can help minimize discomfort.
- 3- Rinse your mouth with warm salt water (1/2 tsp. in 1 cup) three to five times a day for good mouth hygiene.
- 4- Over-the-counter medications can help ease the discomfort of aphthous ulcers. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preferences.
- 5- If the provider prescribes a topical corticosteroid to apply to the ulcers, use the prescription as directed.
- 6- If your symptoms worsen, you have concerns, or the sores do not go away after two weeks, return to the Student Health Center or schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral provider for re-evaluation.