A mouth ulcer is an open sore in the mouth. It is a break in the mucous membrane or the epithelium on the lips or surrounding the mouth.

The types of mouth ulcers are diverse, with a multitude of associated causes including: physical abrasion, acidic fruit, infection, other medical conditions, medications, and cancerous and nonspecific processes. Once formed, the ulcer may be maintained by inflammation and/or secondary infection. Two common types are aphthous ulcers ("canker sores") and cold sores (fever blisters, oral herpes). Cold sores around the lip are caused by viruses, in which some ulcers are a form of herpes.

Causes

- **Trauma**
  - Minor physical injuries
    Trauma to the mouth is a common cause of bacterial introduction. A sharp edge of a tooth, accidental biting (this can be particularly common with sharp canine teeth, or Wisdom teeth), sharp, abrasive, or excessively salty food, hot drinks, poorly fitting dentures, dental braces or trauma from a toothbrush may injure the mucosal lining of the mouth resulting in an ulcer. These ulcers usually heal at a moderate speed if the source of the injury is removed (for example, if poorly fitting dentures are removed or replaced). These ulcers also commonly occur after dental work, when incidental abrasions to the soft tissues of the mouth are common.
  - Chemical injuries
    Chemicals such as aspirin or alcohol that are held or that come in with the oral mucosa may cause tissues to become necrotic and slough off creating an ulcerated surface. There is limited evidence to suggest that Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS), one of the main ingredients in most toothpastes, is associated with an increased incidence of oral ulcers.
    Applying things like crushed pain killer tablets or some dangerous liquids topically into a tooth cavity causes severe ulceration of the surrounding gum.
- **Smoking cessation**
  It is fairly common for smokers to experience mouth ulcers within a week of cessation. The duration varies between individuals, and can range from a month to years. Oral nicotine supplements have shown some reduction in the occurrence. Cuts usually occur below the lining of teeth in the lower jaw.
Causes (cont...)

- **Infection**
  Viral, fungal and bacterial processes can lead to oral ulceration. One way to contract pathogenic oral ulcerations is through the contact of chapped lips with unwashed hands. The reason for this is that bacteria sink into the minuscule cuts caused by the chapped lips.
  - **Viral**
    The most common is *Herpes simplex* virus which causes recurrent herpetiform ulcerations preceded by usually painful multiple vesicles which burst. *Varicella Zoster* (chicken pox, shingles), *Coxsackie A virus* and its associated subtype presentations, are some of the other viral processes that can lead to oral ulceration. HIV creates immunodeficiencies which allow opportunistic infections or neoplasms to proliferate.
  - **Bacterial**
    Bacterial processes leading to ulceration can be caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (tuberculosis) and *Treponema pallidum* (syphilis).
    Opportunistic activity by combinations of otherwise normal bacterial flora, such as aerobic streptococi, *Neisseria, Actinomyces*, spirochetes, and *Bacteroides* species can prolong the ulcerative process.
  - **Fungal**
    *Coccidioides immitis* (valley fever), *Cryptococcus neoformans* (cryptococcosis), *Blastomyces dermatitidis* ("North American Blastomycosis") are some of the fungal processes causing oral ulceration.
  - **Protozoans**
    *Entamoeba histolytica*, a parasitic protozoan, is sometimes known to cause mouth ulcers through formation of cysts.

- **Immune System**
  Many researchers view the causes of aphthous ulcers as a common end product of many different disease processes, each of which is mediated by the immune system. Aphthous ulcers are thought to form when the body becomes aware of and attacks chemicals which it does not recognize.
  - **Immunodeficiency**
    Repeat episodes of mouth ulcers can be indicative of an immunodeficiency, signaling low levels of immunoglobulin in the oral mucous membranes. Chemotherapy, HIV, and mononucleosis are all causes of immunodeficiency with which oral ulcers become a common manifestation.
  - **Autoimmunity**
    Autoimmunity is also a cause of oral ulceration. Mucous membrane pemphigoid, an autoimmune reaction to the epithelial basement membrane, causes desquamation/ulceration of the oral mucosa. Numerous aphthous ulcers could be indicative of an inflammatory autoimmune disease called Behcets Disease. This can later involve skin lesions and uveitis in the eyes. It can be worsened by certain foods and exposure to the sun. Immune modulatory medications are often used such as Interferon alpha.
  - **Allergy**
    Contact with allergens, such as amalgam, can lead to ulcerations of the mucosa. Alternative materials may well bring about other types of allergy.
  - **Dietary**
    Vitamin C deficiencies may lead to scurvy which impairs wound healing, which can contribute to ulcer formation. Similarly deficiencies in iron, vitamin B12, zinc have been linked to oral ulceration.

**Facts:**
- Women have more frequent mouth ulcers than the men.
- Recurring mouth ulcers more commonly affect people less than 45 years.
- Mouth ulcers are not infectious – you cannot catch them from kissing someone.
- Most people will have at least one during their lifetime.
- A mouth ulcer is an exposed nerve which is why they can be so painful.
- Coeliac sufferers often get mouth ulcers if they accidentally consume gluten in their food.

CEDARS - Jebel Ali International Hospital, Dubai, UAE.
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CEDARS - Jebel Ali International Hospital is a full-fledged multi-specialty hospital offering services ranging from Pediatrics to Occupational Health, Laparoscopic Surgery to Internal Medicine. The Hospital is equipped with ICU for medical and surgical emergencies, with two major and one minor operation theatres and runs fully equipped Laboratory and Radiology departments. CEDARS – Jebel Ali International Hospital is accredited by TUV and JCI and located next to JAFZA Gate 2.
Treatment

Symptomatic treatment is the primary approach to dealing with oral ulcers. If their cause is known, then treatment of that condition is also recommended. Adequate oral hygiene may also help in relieving symptoms. Topical antihistamines, antacids, corticosteroids or applications meant to soothe painful ulcers may be helpful, as may be oral analgesics such as paracetamol or ibuprofen and local anesthetic lozenges, paints or mouth rinses such as benzocaine and avoiding spicy or hot foods may reduce pain. Ulcers persisting longer than three weeks may require the attention of a medical practitioner.

Aphthous ulcer can be treated by Silver nitrate, Amlexanox paste.

Medical Consultant for December 2012

Dr. Navid Beizai received his Bachelor's degree of Dental Surgery in 1996 from S.D.M College of Dental Sciences, India after which he obtained his doctorate in dental surgery from Iran in 1997.

Dr. Navid has more than fifteen years experience in clinical dentistry during which he ran his own private clinic in Iran for five years.

His field of interests is root canal therapy, cosmetic restorations, fixed partial dentures and third molar (wisdom teeth) surgical extractions.

Dr. Navid is the head of Department of Dentistry at CEDARS – Jebel Ali International Hospital since 2007. He is also a member of American Dental Association (ADA).

Dental & Orthodontic Department

The department of advanced dentistry in CEDARS - Jebel Ali Hospital is one of the acknowledged centers for premium dental services in the region. The department caters to a multitude of advanced, specialized, routine and general dental procedures.

Our team of highly skilled professionals with their years of clinical expertise meets your demands of complicated and routine dental work. Our dental experts ensure that you receive the finest world class dental care adhering to sound principles, proven practice methodologies and safety measures, at par with internationally acceptable standards.

Our excellence focuses primarily on advanced cosmetic dental procedures, crown & bridge work, removable & fixed dentures, in-office power tooth whitening, metal free ceramics and veneers.

Our experts along with an efficient and friendly team of dental nurses provide the best dental care possible. Mal-aligned or mal-positioned teeth, rotated teeth, proclined, retruded & crowded teeth etc. can be satisfactorily aligned with fixed appliance therapy or orthodontic braces.

Clinic Timings:
Saturday - Thursday
9:30 AM - 9:30 PM