

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 most often affects the tongue but may involve the lips and skin lining inside the mouth. Most people with the condition complain of a burning or scalded feeling. On examination, the affected area will appear normal.

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 is the cause?

The sensation of burning in the mouth can occasionally be the result of medical or dental problems. These include thrush infections and blood or vitamin deficiencies.

The hormonal changes around the menopause can be related to burning mouth syndrome. 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. Burning mouth syndrome is not linked to cancer.

What will happen to me?

If you describe a burning sensation in your mouth you will be examined thoroughly to make sure another medical or dental cause is not responsible. You may need some blood tests to establish the cause.

There are no tests to confirm burning mouth syndrome; diagnosis relies on a description of your symptoms and examination of your mouth. Bloods tests or swabs may be carried out to eliminate other causes of your sore mouth.

Is there any treatment?

There is no cure for burning mouth syndrome; however, treatments are available to help reduce and manage the severity of your symptoms. 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. Changing your toothpaste to a sodium lauryl sulphate-free toothpaste can help to relieve symptoms.

Diffiam spray or mouthwash can help to numb the area and make it more comfortable.

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.

What if I don't get better?

Burning mouth syndrome is a long-term condition and may take years to disappear.

Understanding and managing your triggers for the condition can help improve the symptoms.

If you are prescribed medication it is important that you take this regularly. Continue regular visits to the dentist and maintain good oral hygiene.

Contact us

Oral & Maxillofacial Department, Tel 0118 322 7139, Fax: 0118 322 7675.

Further information

Visit the Trust website at www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Department of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery, August 2018

Review due: August 2020