

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Information sheet on Candida (thrush)

April 2025

An overgrowth of Candida can lead to a yeast infection known more commonly as **thrush**.

Oral Candida (**oral thrush**) presents in babies as white patches (plaques) of fungal growth on the tongue and can also spread to the gums, inside of the cheeks and the roof of the mouth. It can make a baby's mouth sore and lead to pain whilst feeding.

It was previously assumed that if a baby had oral thrush, this could spread to the mother during breastfeeding, causing pain and sore nipples. As a result, advice was to treat the mother and baby simultaneously. However, emerging evidence appears to suggest that cross infection is rare, and therefore this advice is now under question.

Breastfeeding pain and soreness were previously often attributed to nipple thrush. However, it is now recognised that ineffective positioning and attachment are more likely to be the cause. Pain and discomfort may also be caused by expressing milk with a breast pump where the pump suction is high or because of an ill-fitting flange or feeding a baby with a tongue-tie. A comprehensive list of possible clinical causes is presented in the ABM Clinical Protocol #26 referenced below.

A thorough assessment of breastfeeding and skilled support should be the first step in addressing the issue. If pain persists, referral for specialist help is advised to ensure a considered diagnosis before any antifungal treatment for thrush is commenced.

Further information:

- [ABM Clinical Protocol #26: Persistent Pain with Breastfeeding](#)
- [The Breastfeeding Network's update on persistent breast and nipple pain when breastfeeding](#)
- [The Breastfeeding Network's factsheet on fungal infections and breastfeeding](#)
- [NICE: What are the causes of nipple pain? \(revised February 2025\)](#)
- Note: UKDILAS, who provide information on prescribing where a correct diagnosis of thrush has been made for mother or baby, is currently in the process of reviewing the evidence. Their information sheet will be updated accordingly.