Does your baby have a white tongue? Think Thrush

White curds that don’t wipe off can be indicative of thrush. You find cottage cheese like curds coating the inside of your baby’s tongue and inner cheeks and try to wipe them off to no avail. It’s not breast milk, not formula. It’s thrush.

Thrush, fancy medical name Oral Candidiasis, is caused by an overgrowth of yeast, called Candida. Although not painful, it may cause discomfort akin to having a film of cotton coating the inside the mouth.

We ALL have yeast, which is a type of fungus, on our bodies. Usually we have enough bacteria on our bodies to suppress the growth of yeast, but in cases when there is less than usual bacteria present such as in young babies or in kids who are on antibiotics, Candida can emerge. For older kids using inhaled

steroids for asthma, failure to rinse out the mouth after medication use also promotes an environment conducive to thrush.

Treatment

To treat thrush, doctors usually prescribe oral Nystatin, an anti-fungal/anti-yeast medication, which works topically. Parents apply the medicine to the inside of the baby's mouth after feedings four times per day. Use Nystatin until thrush is no longer visible for 48 hours. A course usually takes one to two weeks to complete. An oral medication called fluconazole (brand name Diflucan) may also be prescribed.

Watch out. Candida may also be thriving on mom's breasts or on pacifiers or bottle nipples. Mothers can apply the same medicine to their breasts after breast feeding. Scrub pacifiers, bottle nipples, and any other object that goes in to a baby's mouth extra well with hot water and soap. Or, you can use the dishwasher to wash away the Candida.

Thrush that persists despite proper treatment can signal an immune system problem. So if your child's thrush is not resolving in the expected time, let your child's health care provider know.

Does yeast cause infections elsewhere?

If you are a female who is familiar with vaginal yeast infections, you may wonder if the same organism causes both thrush and yeast infections. Yes, it is the same organism. But don't have any mom-guilt. You did not cause the thrush. Yeast tends to thrive in wet moist areas such as the diaper area, mouth and even the neck folds of drooling babies.

A newborn's tongue may always look slightly white. This "coated tongue" in young babies could be residual breast milk

or formula and does not need treatment. Even if there is a little residual yeast, remember that yeast is just a part of our microbiome along with all the other wonderful microscopic organisms that call human bodies their home. If you are unsure, your baby’s health care provider’s door is always open. They will be happy to take a peek.

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