



TEN STEP TUESDAY

Thrush & Breastfeeding

What is thrush?

Candida albicans is a type of fungus that can cause infections in various warm and humid places, such as the nipples, breasts, skin, vagina, mouth, and baby's bottom. These infections are commonly called thrush or yeast infections. Candida normally inhabits the mouth, gastrointestinal tract, and vagina, but can overrun almost any part of the body under the right conditions.

Maternal risk factors for developing thrush:

- Recent use of certain medications like: antibiotics, birth control pills, cortisone or steroids.
- Cracked or damaged nipples
- Vaginal infections
- Diabetes
- A weakened immune system
- A diet very high in sugar and yeast, or low in vitamins and minerals

Signs of thrush may include:

In the lactating parent:

- Redness, shininess, irritation and/or peeling skin on the areola or nipple
- Nipple and/or breast pain:
 - Often at the end of a feed, or anytime during or in between feeds
 - Burning and/or itchiness of the areola or nipple
 - Deeper pain, either burning, throbbing, or shooting
 - Pain that does not get better even with a good latch

In the baby:

- White plaque in the mouth (cheeks or on the tongue) that you cannot remove
- A red rash on the bum and diaper area
- Fussiness or refusal to take the breast, gassiness or general irritability

Treatment Options for Thrush

- Nystatin is a topical antifungal ointment that may be prescribed in cases where it appears that only the nipples are involved. A liquid version should also be prescribed for treatment of the baby's mouth, even if the baby is not exhibiting any symptoms.
- Fluconazole (Diflucan) is another prescription medication for the treatment thrush. It is typically reserved for severe, long-standing or repetitive cases of thrush.
- Vinegar rinses: Rinse your nipples with 1 tablespoon vinegar diluted in 1 cup water, once an hour for a 24-hour period. Allow the nipples to air dry whenever possible.
- Oral probiotic supplements may be useful to treat and prevent thrush as they contain beneficial bacteria that can help to limit the candida in the digestive tract. For best results, probiotic supplements should be taken for at least two weeks beyond the end of the symptoms.
- Dietary changes such as limiting simple carbohydrates can help minimize yeast growth by decreasing the sugars on which yeast thrives. Reducing consumption of dairy products or yeast-containing foods can also be helpful.

Home hygiene: For cases of severe or repetitive thrush, certain things can be done in the home to prevent the growth of fungus in general.

- Wash your hands and baby's hands often. Consider using paper towels.
- Avoid breast/nursing pads if possible. If you must use them, buy the disposable type, and change them after every feeding.
- Wear a fresh clean bra every day. Wash all clothes and towels that come into contact with your breasts or baby in hot water.
- Boil any objects that come in contact with baby's mouth (pacifiers, bottle nipples, teething rings) should be boiled for a few minutes once a day. If pumping, sterilize your pump parts once a day.
- All family members should be checked and treated for any candida infections such as jock itch, finger/toe nail infections, vaginal yeast infections, etc. Keep in mind that pets can also harbor yeast.

For more information contact

Cara Gerhardt, BSN RN IBCLC, coordinator@high5kansas.org