

Burning mouth syndrome (BMS)

Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery

Information for Patients

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What is burning mouth syndrome (BMS)?

BMS is a common condition. It feels like a burning pain or hot scalding sensation, causing discomfort. It usually affects the tongue or lips. Other parts of the skin inside the mouth can also feel uncomfortable. The mouth usually looks normal.

Common symptoms of BMS

- Burning hot or scalding sensation, which can come and go or be continuous.
- Dryness, unpleasant taste.
- Tingling or numbness.

The symptoms may get worse when speaking, eating hot and spicy foods, or when stressed.

The symptoms may get better by avoiding eating certain foods, resting or after sleep, or when you are doing other activities to distract you.

BMS is more common in women, but can also happen in men. It often happens around the time of the menopause.

What causes BMS?

The cause of BMS is unknown. There are a few things that may cause it to happen. These include:

- Thrush or other infections in the mouth.
- Dentures that do not fit properly.
- Dry mouth.
- Blood and vitamin deficiencies.
- Anxiety, stress or depression.
- Hormonal changes around menopause.
- Allergic reactions to medications.

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How is BMS diagnosed?

BMS is diagnosed by checking your medical history. We also do a full mouth examination to rule out possible underlying causes, such as thrush. We will usually ask for a blood test to rule out blood and vitamin deficiencies. We will do a mouth swab to check for thrush.

Is there a treatment for BMS?

There is no cure for BMS. It is important to accept that it may take some years to disappear, mainly if stress is one of the possible causes for you. Symptoms may improve with:

- Reassurance that there is no serious underlying disease.
- Relaxation, yoga, meditation or cognitive behavioural therapy.
- Low dose antidepressants (they can be helpful for pain control). They have also been found to decrease sensitivity in the mouth.
- Keeping the mouth moist and clean as BMS is worse with dryness.
- Difflam mouthwash can help to numb the mouth in severe cases. You can buy it over the counter in pharmacies or major supermarkets. It can however irritate the mouth for some people.
- Your GP may consider hormone therapy. But this has not been proven to improve symptoms.
- Recent trials have also suggested that algalipic acid **may** be useful. It is found in red meat, carrots, beets, spinach, broccoli, and potatoes. It is also available as a supplement.

What if it does not improve?

Around half of all people with BMS find it improves or disappears eventually. We cannot cure BMS but can often reduce symptoms. Learning to live with the symptoms and keeping in mind that there is no underlying disease is often the best way to manage this problem.

Contact details

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