
UNIT 24 SOME INFECTIONS OF THE MOUTH AND THROAT

Structure

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24.1 INTRODUCTION

The state of the mouth and teeth gives a good indication of the health and hygiene of the person.

The mouth and tongue should normally be pink and the teeth white. There should be no bad breath. In many illnesses, the earliest indicator is the tongue. It becomes thick and coated in disturbances of the alimentary system like constipation, dysentery, typhoid etc. It is sore and red in other fevers, vitamin deficiency and if irritants, like acid etc., have been ingested. In thrush, which is a fungal infection, the tongue is covered with a thick white substance.

The teeth and the throat are the other important indicators. The teeth should be white and the gums pink. Most children suffer from toothache at sometime or the other in their lives.

Sore throats are also common during childhood. In this Unit, we shall read about some common diseases of the mouth and the throat, their causes and treatment.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to

- recognize symptoms that indicate disease of the mouth and throat
- understand the causes of these infections and their treatment
- treat simple infections yourself
- know when to refer the child to the doctor
- explain to the parents how to prevent infections of mouth and throat in children.

24.2 STRUCTURE OF THE MOUTH AND THROAT

The mouth contains the tongue and the teeth. At the back of the mouth is the throat, and at each side of the throat, there are two special glands called the tonsils.

The first teeth — the incisors in the middle of the mouth — erupt (come out) between the fourth and sixth month. After that, the teeth come out in pairs. The molars come out at the age of two years. In all, twenty teeth erupt. These are called 'milk teeth' and are retained till the age of six years.

After six years, the teeth fall out one by one and the permanent teeth erupt. A child of ten or twelve will usually have twenty eight teeth.

24.3 SYMPTOMS OF DISEASE IN THE MOUTH AND THROAT

The following complaints (symptoms) are indicators of some diseases in the mouth and the throat.

- 1) Sore mouth and tongue
- 2) Pain on swallowing
- 3) Sore throat
- 4) Tooth ache and bleeding gums
- 5) Ulcers in the mouth.

24.4 CAUSES OF THE SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT OF THE CONDITION

Let us now read what may be the causes of the above symptoms and how can the condition be treated.

24.4.1 Sore Mouth and Tongue

This can be due to many causes.

- a) The commonest is deficiency of Vitamin B-Complex, particularly of B2. This condition occurs when there is heavy infestation of worms, and they interfere with the natural production of Vitamin B in the body. The inner lining of the mouth becomes red and sore, and burns when, say, food touches it. Later, there are small yellowish ulcers. The tongue also becomes red and sore and later fissured. The angles of the mouth become whitish and cracked. This is called "angular stomatitis".

Treatment: The child must be treated for worms as explained in Unit 22. Vitamin B complex should be given three times a day until the tissues heal. Soft foods that are not pungent should be given.

- b) The other causes of sore mouth is **high fever, measles and chicken-pox**. In these conditions, the mouth also has lesions (rash) and this makes it sore. The mouth also becomes dry, the lips crack and may even bleed.
- c) Thrush, which is a fungal infection in the mouth, also causes sore mouth and tongue. This infection is characterised by a white coating of the tongue and mouth.

Thrush is seen in malnourished children and newborn babies of undernourished mothers. Thrush also occurs when a child has been on massive doses of antibiotics.

Treatment: 1% Gertian violet should be applied on the tongue and sides of mouth. Nutrition has to be improved.

- d) **Coated tongue** — Though the exact cause of this is unknown, it indicates constipation and other disturbances of the alimentary system. It is also seen in fevers like typhoid.

When the underlying cause of the disturbance is treated, the coating on the tongue disappears.

24.4.2 Pain on Swallowing

This is usually due to a sore throat, and/or enlarged tonsils. This occurs due to infection, and spreads from one child to another while coughing or sneezing.

Treatment: Gargling with warm salt water helps, but small children cannot usually gargle.

Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between severe tonsillitis (infection and enlargement of the tonsils) and diphtheria. In case of doubt, the child should be taken to the doctor.

24.4.3 Sore Throat

This usually accompanies the above conditions. In young children, sore throats can be caused by a particular germ (streptococcal) which is very harmful and can affect the joints and the heart. Therefore, it is important to treat sore throats in young children immediately. If the sore throat does not improve within three days, refer the child to the doctor. You have read about sore throats in detail in Unit 23 on respiratory disorders.

24.4.4 Tooth Ache and Bleeding Gums

The teeth are good indicators of the health status of the child. Clean teeth with pink gums are a sign of good health and good hygiene.

A tooth ache is usually due to caries of the teeth. In caries, the bacteria in the mouth erode the enamel of the teeth and cause holes in the teeth. When this happens, the nerve in the tooth gets exposed and causes pain when any food particle touches the nerve end.

Caries is caused by acid producing bacteria which act on the food particles in the mouth. It is made worse by sweets and aerated drinks. It occurs when the child does not maintain dental hygiene.

Prevention: Caries can be prevented by brushing the teeth regularly twice a day — after waking up and before going to bed. Apart from this, the mouth must be rinsed and the teeth cleaned after consuming eatables so that food particles do not remain for the bacteria to act upon.

Treatment: The caries can be filled up only by a dentist. So refer the child to the doctor. In the centre, the child can be given some cold tea decoction (without milk) to gargle with.

Bleeding gums indicate Vitamin C deficiency. This has been discussed in Unit 17 of Block 5 of this Course.

24.4.5 Ulcers in the Mouth

Sometimes children have small ulcers in the mouth. They are yellow patches which are very painful. They can occur due to many causes.

- a) The usual cause is **deficiency of Vitamin B2 (Riboflavin)**. The child will complain of burning in the mouth and difficulty in eating.
In very severe cases, the tongue also will have ulcers.
- b) Rarely, ulcers may be caused by a virus.
- c) **Measles** also causes ulcers in the mouth. In fact, this is the earliest symptom of measles. The child will have a runny nose, watering of the eyes and slight fever. On the inside of the mouth, there may be a few spots called Koplick's spots. These are the ulcers. They disappear when the measles resolves.
- d) In **chicken-pox** also, the inside of the mouth becomes red and sore.

Treatment: Treatment for all ulcers is gargling with plain cold milk. Avoid all pungent food. Gargling with coconut milk or even some buttermilk will help. As the infection of measles and chicken-pox subside, so will the ulcers.

If the ulcer is due to deficiency of vitamin B2, then supplements of Vitamin B complex should be given to the child.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Fill in the blanks
 - a) Vitamin B2 deficiency is commonly seen in
 - b) is a fungal infection seen in malnourished children where there is a white coating on the tongue and mouth.
 - c) Tooth ache is caused by
 - d) Vitamin B2 deficiency causes in the mouth.

- e) Constipation, digestive disorders and typhoid cause
tongue.
- f) Bleeding gums indicate deficiency of
- g) also occurs when the child is on a massive dose of
antibiotics.

2) What are some indicators of diseases in the mouth or the throat?

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3) What are some of the causes of sore mouth and throat?

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4) Why is it important to treat sore throats immediately in children?

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5) How can caries be prevented?

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6) What is the treatment for ulcers in the mouth?

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24.5 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, you have read about common infections of the mouth and throat, their symptoms, causes and how they can be treated.

Sore mouth and tongue, pain on swallowing, sore throat, tooth ache and bleeding gums and ulcers in the mouth are some symptoms of problem in the mouth and throat. The causes of these are many and treatment has to be done accordingly.

Sore throats in young children that do not improve within three days should be referred immediately to the doctor, as the infection could be due to a germ that affects the joints and the heart.

Sometimes it becomes difficult to differentiate between severe tonsillitis and diphtheria. In case of such doubt, refer the child to the doctor.

24.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1)
 - a) Worm infestation
 - b) Thrush
 - c) Caries
 - d) Ulcers
 - e) Coated
 - f) Vitamin C
 - g) Thrush
- 2)
 - a) Sore mouth and tongue
 - b) Pain on swallowing
 - c) Sore throat
 - d) Tooth ache and bleeding gums
 - e) Ulcers in the mouth
- 3)
 - a) Deficiency of Vitamin B-complex due to worm infestation;
 - b) high fever, chicken pox, measles;
 - c) Thrush;
 - d) digestive disorders.
- 4) Because sore throats can be caused by a particular germ, called streptococcal, which if not treated, can affect the joints and the heart. If the child's sore throat does not improve within three days, refer to the doctor.
- 5) By brushing the teeth regularly, twice a day. By rinsing the mouth properly after consuming eatables.
- 6) Gargling with cold milk. Gargling with coconut milk or butter milk will help. All pungent food must be avoided. If ulcers are due to deficiency of B group of vitamins, then supplements of these should be given.