

**"MY MOUTH IS FULL OF ULCERS"**

**At the time of writing, my mouth is absolutely full of ulcers and it's driving me round the bend. This is not unusual for me – I can pretty much guarantee that after a stressful week or late night I'll have a nasty one (or several) sprouting up. What could be causing this and how do I make it stop?**

**Sharmani Barge advises:**

All of the following factors are known triggers for mouth ulcers. Do any of these apply to you?

- Poor dental hygiene, badly fitting dentures or braces
- Trauma to the gums from harsh tooth brushes
- Nutritional deficiencies (amongst the most common seem to be zinc, iron, vitamin B12, and folic acid, but a multi-vitamin and mineral formula would cover all bases)
- Hormonal imbalance
- Viral infection and depleted immunity
- Stress and/or fatigue
- Food allergies and intolerances

Out of all these triggers, my experience has been that the last three are the most common causes of ulcers, so it's worthwhile looking at these first.

Maximise your immunity by increasing your consumption of fruit and vegetables and avoid sugar and alcohol, both of which deplete your resistance. If you're a smoker, now is the time to stop.

Supplementing zinc with lozenges or tablets has been shown to be effective in patients with low serum zinc levels. The best time to take zinc is at night before bed. 15mg doses of zinc can be purchased from health food shops. Better still, see your local naturopath/nutritionist for a higher dose. To find a practitioner, go to [practitionerfinder.com](http://practitionerfinder.com).

A good vitamin C powder with bioflavonoids can be helpful in reducing the healing time of ulcers and preventing further ulcer formation. \* Between 1–3g of vitamin C a day split dosage has been shown to be most beneficial in treating ulcers.

Some people find that taking a vitamin B complex helps to reduce the frequency of their mouth ulcers, although it's unclear whether this is due to improved ability to handle stress, or to the correction of an underlying deficiency of one of the B vitamins.

If you suspect you might be reacting to something you're eating, it's worth visiting your naturopath or nutritionist to undergo some dietary assessment (wheat and dairy products seem to be the main culprits).

Watch out for citrus, pineapple and kiwi fruit, which contain fruit acids that seem to irritate many sufferers, as well as salty and vinegary foods. Mouthwash, chewing gum, tobacco and coffee are also best avoided, as well as food with sharp edges, such as crisps.

To encourage healing, I recommend painting the ulcer with calendula tincture, available from your herbalist, or Manuka honey from your local health food store.

**HELP FOR EXCESSIVE FLATULENCE**

**My partner breaks wind, loudly and pungently, all the time. He reckons that if he holds it in it makes him feel sick and uncomfortable, but it isn't very pleasant to live with. He does eat quite a lot of red meat, which I can't imagine helps too much, but on the whole I think his diet is pretty balanced and healthy, with plenty of fruit and vegetables. It sounds like a joke, but this really is getting me down. Please advise.**

**Dr Caroline Longmore advises:**

It sounds like your boyfriend may be suffering from IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) – the most common gastro intestinal disorder (30–50 per cent of people have it). IBS is a functional disorder of the large intestine and has been attributed to physiological, psychological and dietary factors. The pungent smell of your partner's wind is an indicator of incomplete protein digestion, and you do mention that he eats a lot of red meat.

Attention needs to be paid to a number of different factors. First, he needs to rule out any allergenic/intolerant foods, plus sugar and all processed foods. He should try avoiding red meat for a while and replacing it with fresh fish (a lot easier to digest). At the same time he should increase his intake of fibre, in particular from fresh vegetables.

He should also think about reducing stress levels and increasing the amount of exercise he does. He could also consider counselling for any psychological issues he may have.

In terms of nutritional supplements, a good probiotic should be added to his daily diet to optimise the levels of good gut bacteria. A digestive enzyme supplement containing protease, HCl and pepsin, taken with each meal, will also help the breakdown of the food – in particular the red meat.

You can also suggest that he tries a botanical medicine such as bitters to improve his digestion, such as gentian tincture (10 drops in a glass of water – sip slowly 10–15 minutes before meals). Carminative herbs to ease the wind include peppermint, chamomile and fennel – all taste great as herbal teas.

Combining foods carefully will make digestion more efficient – in particular, avoid eating concentrated proteins (meat, fish, chicken) at the same meal as carbohydrates (pasta, rice, potatoes). Instead have protein with salad or vegetables. Only eat fresh fruit and juices on an empty stomach.

For physical therapy I suggest a daily leisurely walk for 20 minutes. And – very important – chew properly! Aim for 30 to 50 times each mouthful.

**MEET THE PANEL****STELLA NEW**

is a registered homeopath and dietary therapist based in West Sussex. Prior to her training she spent many years as an expedition leader, taking groups into some of the most challenging parts of the world, where she was inspired by the use of natural remedies for treating all manner of ailments.

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**HARALD GAIER**

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**"WHY THE SWOLLEN FINGER?"**

**I've recently noticed that my middle finger joint has become swollen and stiff. I wonder if it might be arthritis, due to my age (I'm 58), but I haven't suffered before and I don't have a family history of the disease. What else could be causing it?**

**Harald Gaier advises:**

A single joint becoming swollen and stiff may be nothing more than inflammation of that joint (in your case, your one middle finger) and not the beginning of rheumatoid arthritis. This can occur as a result of an increased porousness in the lining of your bowels, which happens if you have, or have had, mild digestive problems. The good news is that it is reversible. The intestinal tract can be healed by adding more raw food to your diet, especially fresh organic vegetable juices, which provide particular enzymes that do the healing. Fasting on such vegetable juices will help to repair the gut. A diet consisting of 60–70 per cent raw organic plant food will help to reverse the degeneration that has occurred in the gut lining, as well improve energy and vitality.

**SOME PEOPLE FIND THAT TAKING A VITAMIN B COMPLEX HELPS TO REDUCE THE FREQUENCY OF THEIR MOUTH ULCERS, ALTHOUGH IT'S UNCLEAR WHETHER THIS IS DUE TO IMPROVED ABILITY TO HANDLE STRESS, OR A CORRECTION OF A DEFICIENCY.**