



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL  
ASSOCIATION INC.

**July 2011**

## **What's in your mouth?**

Your mouth is home to hundreds of bacteria and fungi, most of which are harmless and present in balanced numbers. When the number of bad bacteria outnumber the good bacteria, this can lead to disease, infections or viruses. The most common examples of these are ulcers, lumps, swelling, and red and white patches. Your dentist can play a role in the detection, diagnosis and management of these, so regular dental check-ups are important.

### **Ulcers**

Many people will have experienced a mouth ulcer. There are many causes of ulcers and the most common are:

- Damage to tissue in your mouth often caused by biting the skin or burning it on hot food
- Food allergies
- Medication
- Infectious diseases such as herpes and thrush
- Stress ulcers
- Loose dentures which rub on the gums

In most cases ulcers caused by biting the skin in your mouth tend to heal themselves within 7-10 days. However, ulcers can chronically reoccur and be quite painful. If this is the case, seek advice from a health professional to get a proper diagnosis of the cause and treatment as required.

### **Lumps and swelling**

Isolated lumps and swelling in your mouth are often reactive lesions caused by:

- Mild trauma – such as biting or bumping the inside of your cheek, lip or tongue
- A sharp area on a tooth, which causes chronic irritation
- Hormones – especially during pregnancy, which can lead to an overgrowth of tissue in your mouth

Removing the cause of the lump or swelling will often result in the lump or swelling subsiding. If the lump or swelling is due to hormones, such as those present in pregnancy, this will usually clear up after pregnancy. Surgery can be necessary for more severe cases.

### **White and red patches**

Areas of inflammation in your mouth can lead to white and red patches. White and red patches are often a sign of:

- Cheek or lip biting
- Infection – fungal infections such as thrush

- Mouth disease – both contagious and non-contagious in nature

White or red patches in certain areas of the mouth such as under the tongue and at the back of the mouth, and areas of the tongue can indicate that the lesion may be cancer.

If red or white patches, reoccurring painful ulcers, or swelling and lumps appear in your mouth, seek advice from a dentist or medical professional immediately.

For more information on looking after your mouth visit [www.dentalhealthweek.com.au](http://www.dentalhealthweek.com.au)