



Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE)

Burning mouth Syndrome Patient Advice Sheet

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Policy will be updated as required in response to a change in national policy or evidence-based guideline.

Burning Mouth Syndrome

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about Burning Mouth Syndrome (BMS). It tells you what it is, what may cause it, how it is diagnosed and what treatment is available.

What is burning mouth syndrome?

Burning mouth syndrome is a condition characterised by a burning or unpleasant sensation in the mouth. It usually affects the tongue, lips and cheeks but other parts of the skin lining inside the mouth can also feel uncomfortable. The discomfort is usually present daily and continues throughout the day; often becoming worse later in the day. It is generally a persistent condition, although it may completely resolve in some patients over time.

Burning mouth syndrome is a common condition. It more commonly affects women, particularly after the menopause, but men can also develop the condition. Affected women are usually 50 years of age or over.

Some people find that symptoms increase with eating hot or spicy foods and in times of stress.

What is the cause?

Burning Mouth Syndrome is believed to be a neuropathic condition (changes in the nerves). Factors that may play a role include hormonal changes around the menopause or when somebody is stressed, anxious or depressed. Not knowing why your mouth is burning can also make you anxious. There is little to no evidence that Burning Mouth Syndrome is inherited.

On examination, the mouth appears clinically normal. Despite the normal appearance of the mouth the symptoms are very real and can be distressing.

What will happen to me?

If you describe a burning sensation in your mouth, you will be examined thoroughly to make sure another medical or dental cause is not responsible. A burning sensation in the mouth can occasionally be the result of other medical or dental problems including infections (e.g., thrush), dry mouth, or blood deficiencies.

There is no diagnostic test for Burning Mouth Syndrome but blood tests may be arranged for you through your GP to exclude other possible causes such as anaemia or a deficiency of minerals/vitamins like iron, folate or vitamin B12.

Sometimes people get worried that they may have mouth cancer. This is quite a common anxiety of people with burning mouth syndrome. Carrying out a thorough examination and any necessary tests will enable your dentist and doctor to reassure you that there is no sign of cancer.

Is there any treatment?

Burning Mouth Syndrome is a long-term condition and cannot be cured. The aim of treatment is to reduce the severity and help you to manage your symptoms. Hormone replacement therapy has not been shown to improve the symptoms, and neither have vitamins if your blood tests are normal. Symptoms often improve following reassurance that there is no serious disease present in the mouth.

The burden of having a persistently sore mouth can lead to low mood, anxiety or depression. If this is a problem for you it should be discussed with a healthcare professional.

Treatment in the form of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (talking therapy) undertaken with a psychologist can be more effective than drug treatments.

In the same way that low doses of antidepressants can help patients with neuralgia even if they are not depressed, sometimes low doses of antidepressants can relieve the symptoms of burning mouth syndrome.

What if I don't get better?

We know that we can't always make you better and the most important part of treatment is to understand your condition and appreciate how stress affects your symptoms. Relaxation, yoga and meditation can help reduce your stress.

Trying not to focus on the feeling, learning to live with the sensation, and remembering that no serious disease has been found can sometimes be the best way of managing this common problem.

Continue to visit your dentist regularly and maintain good oral hygiene to prevent any tooth decay or gum disease which may cause pain.