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BURNING MOUTH SYNDROME

This leaflet has been designed to improve your understanding of Burning Mouth Syndrome and contains answers to many commonly asked questions. If you have other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask.

What is burning mouth syndrome?

Burning mouth syndrome (BMS) is a condition affecting the lining of the mouth that causes it to feel burnt or scalded. It's often not clear why it happens and it most frequently affects women, especially after the menopause. It can also affect men. Most people with the condition complain of a burning or scalded sensation affecting the tongue, lips, cheeks and palate but other parts of the mouth can also be affected.

What is the cause?

This sensation can occasionally be the result of medical or dental problems such as a thrush infection and blood or vitamin deficiencies.

Hormonal changes around the menopause can be related to burning mouth syndrome. It can also occur or get worse when somebody is stressed, anxious or depressed, or going through a difficult time in their life. Not knowing why your mouth is sore can also make you anxious.

What will happen to me?

If you have BMS you will be examined to check there is no other medical or dental condition causing the problem. Some blood tests may be arranged for you to look for a possible cause: these could include a full blood count and vitamin levels in the blood.

Sometimes people get worried that they may have a tumour in or near the mouth. This is quite a common anxiety in people with this condition. Carrying out a thorough examination and necessary tests will enable you to be reassured you that all is normal with no sign of a serious problem.

Is there any treatment?

Hormone replacement therapy hasn't 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 burning feelings can sometimes be worse at times of stress and often go away when life is running more smoothly. In some people alpha lipoic acid (from a health food shops) helps and sometimes low dose antidepressants can relieve the symptoms of burning mouth syndrome even in people without depression.

What if I don't get better?

It's well known that BMS continues in some people despite treatment. Trying not to focus on the feeling, learning to live with the sensation, and remembering that no serious disease has been found are often the best ways of managing this common problem.

For further advice and information, please see:

- The British Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons: www.baoms.org.uk