



# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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## Canker Sores and Cold Sores(Fever Blisters)

Canker sores (also called “aphthous ulcers” or “aphthous stomatitis”) and fever blisters (cold sores) are actually two separate and distinct lesions. The following will help you distinguish between them.

<u>Symptoms</u>	<u>Canker Sores</u>	<u>Cold Sores/Fever Blisters</u>
Pain	Intense	Intense
Fever	No	Possibly
Bad Breath	No	Yes, if extensive inside mouth
Salivation	No difference	Increased
Body aches/ fatigue	Not usually	Possibly
Swollen Glands	No	Possibly; neck glands
Contagious	No	Yes
Duration	3-14 days	10-14 days
Recurrence	Yes; may be at different site	Yes, often at same site
Appearance	Gray to yellow or white skin lesions, surrounded by bright red edge	Yellow-white ulcer or small blister-like sore with clear fluid, surrounded by a red halo
Location	Usually in the mouth, inside cheeks, lips, on gums, tongue or soft palate.	Usually on or around lips rather than inside mouth

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## Cause

The cause of **canker sores** is not yet known. However, some of the following may initiate or aggravate lesions:

1. Stress or emotional factors
2. Trauma to mouth, lips or dental irritation
3. Certain foods; citrus fruits, spices, chocolate, nuts, tomatoes
4. Deficiency of iron, vitamin B12, or folic acid
5. Crash dieting or changes in eating patterns
6. Menstruation in women

The cause of **cold sores** is the Herpes Simplex virus. The virus may still be present in the body even when cold sores are not present. Some people may have recurrent cold sores. Factors that can trigger the virus to reoccur include:

1. Exposure to sunlight or UV rays
2. Physical and emotional stress
3. Certain foods or drugs
4. Trauma to lips, mouth
5. Fatigue
6. Menstruation in women

## Treatment

Although there is no cure for either type of lesion, the goal of treatment is to relieve the symptoms by lessening the pain, decreasing the duration, and reducing recurrences.

Treatments for **canker sores** include: topical anesthetics, such as benzocaine, to relieve pain, oral rinses before meals, dental protective pastes (ex. Orabase) to prevent irritation, and products such as Kanka to provide an anesthetic and protective coating. For severe cases, prescription medication, such as apthasol, may be needed to reduce discomfort and promote healing. Studies have found that neither vitamins nor special foods help in treating canker sores unless a specific deficiency exists.

Treatment of **cold sores** includes over-the-counter topical analgesics such as Oragel and Kanka. Antivirals, either oral or topical help decrease the duration and severity of symptoms. They do not cure the virus and should be used within 24 hours of the outbreak. For most of these medications, a prescription is required.

Please see your health care provider if your mouth ulcers become more severe, persist for greater than 2 weeks, or continue to recur.