



After Antibiotics During delivery:

Addressing thrush and other issues in Mama and Baby

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Introduction

Thrush can be an unwelcome challenge in the breastfeeding relationship. The pain it can cause during nursing can be severe enough to be an obstacle to nursing. Mothers may often find their doctor or other caregiver at a loss of how to support or treat the infection. What most people don't know is how thrush is usually a late symptom of a more broad yeast overgrowth in the mother and her baby. Guidance on thrush usually only offers advice about how to kill the yeast at the breast in the mother, or in the mouth of the baby. This leaves the underlying condition intact, which will rear its head in the form of recurrent thrush or yeast infections, or more serious conditions. In this paper, we'll discuss ways of making the mother and baby more comfortable while the underlying yeast overgrowth is treated, how to treat the yeast imbalance, and ways to speed recovery right at the breast.

What is thrush?

Thrush is the common name for Candidiasis, a yeast infection of the mucous membranes. Thrush can be experienced in the mother or her baby. The mother may experience burning or shooting pain during nursing, red and itchy nipples, and other discomforts. Her baby may experience white patchiness in the mouth, or may pull off the breast, "fuss" at the breast, refuse to nurse, or even make clicking sounds. This infection can be passed back and forth between mom and her baby.

Thrush can be incredibly painful, which can make the nursing relationship stressful, or abandoned entirely.

Why does it happen?

Yeasts make up part of what is normally a healthy [microflora](#) in a person. Of our total body weight, it is estimated that about 10% is actually the weight of microbes in or on our body. These microorganisms are a mixture of bacteria, viruses, parasites, and yeasts. In a healthy individual, they are in a proportion that is in balance for that person, and helps us to digest our foods, synthesize nutrients, absorb nutrition, and generally keep us healthy. Illness is experienced when there is an imbalance. Our modern lifestyle is constantly pushing the population to be heavy on yeasts: high sugar/starch diets; chlorinated water that kill the bacteria; food that is cleaned, cooked, stripped or otherwise devoid of live microbes; and antibiotic use all help to select for yeasts, which thrive when the other kinds of microbes are killed off or not encouraged. This is why thrush and other yeast infections are so commonly seen after a course of antibiotics, including when antibiotics are used during childbirth for the control of Group B Streptococcus, or as part of a Cesarean birth. Antibiotics target some or all of the bacteria in the body, killing them off and leaving the yeast population unchecked. Hence, an imbalance.

The long view

If you are a nursing mother reading this, hoping for a fix to the thrush symptoms you are experiencing, the long view on why you're experiencing thrush and how to treat it may be discouraging. Thrush is only experienced when there is an imbalance in the entire body, which **MUST** be addressed if you are to restore balance and avoid dealing with recurrent yeast *or deeper issues*. There are myriad recommendations for how to deal with *the symptoms of* thrush, which typically revolve around killing the yeast at the breast. This is helpful in the short term, to make yourself and nursing more comfortable while the more long-term goal of creating more balance is slowly achieved. But to only deal with the *symptoms* of a greater imbalance is to exhaust yourself chasing different symptoms around, much like shoveling snow when it is still snowing. When you eliminate a symptom without addressing the root cause, the underlying illness is forced to drive deeper into the body. Later we will discuss ways of dealing with the painful and debilitating symptoms of thrush, but it is imperative to be simultaneously addressing the underlying problem.

Addressing the underlying problem

The underlying issue with thrush, recurrent yeast infections and many other maladies is that the population of germs in your body is out of balance, possibly to the point that the yeast abundance has drilled holes in the digestive system ("Leaky gut syndrome). Getting your "balance" back in shape is going to require some long-term changes while you heal. There are a lot of ways that you can do this, but all of them start with a change in diet, and add in other details to help kill the extra yeast, replace them with a wider diversity of germs, and heal the surface of the gut. Below are a few different approaches.

- The GAPS diet or SCD diet

The [Gut and Psychology Diet](#) or the [Specific Carbohydrate Diet](#) are similar approaches with the same aim: to remove from the diet foods that feed yeast. This succeeds in killing the extra yeast, and also giving the gut time to heal. In addition to the books *Breaking the Vicious Cycle* by Elaine Gottschall and *Gut and Psychology Syndrome* by Natasha Campbell-McBride, their websites offer great support information.

For those trying the SCD diet, the [Pecanbread](#) website is very helpful for recipe advice, as well as advice for how to re-introduce foods into the diet.

For people dealing with deeper issues than superficial thrush such as food allergies, reflux, autism, Crohn's disease, Irritable Bowl Syndrome, autoimmune disease and other issues, Natasha Campbell-McBrides [article](#) does an amazing job of explaining what is going on in the gut and why it is leading to broader health problems.

- [The Candida diet](#)

The philosophy with the Candida diet is the same as the GAPS or SCD diet, but the foods emphasized are a little bit different. You may need to try both diet approaches to see which one you feel better on. You may be surprised to see what "symptoms" you've always had that you thought were "normal", such as gassiness, heartburn, diaper rash, reflux, diarrhea or constipation, brain fog, poor sleep, eczema, acne, etc.

- Support from Shaklee brand supplements

The Shaklee company has distributors that know more about yeast and how to help your body heal than any other mainstream health consultant I've ever encountered. The company makes supplements to support the healing of the gut, cleansing the blood and supporting nutrients that you may be deficient in. If you don't have a Shaklee representative that you already know and trust, contact Debbie Miller of Healthy Path Consultants at 517-281-7260 or debbie@healthypathconsultants.com.

- The Susun Weed approach

There are so many different approaches to yeast overgrowth, but this one is elegant in it's simplicity. She focuses on eating a lot of naturally-fermented products such as moldy cheeses, unwashed organic produce, cut back on sugar and....eating dirt every day for a month. Read more of her letter and community thoughts on it [here](#).

Extra ways to support your body and make yourself more comfortable

If you're like most people, you skipped right to this section because you wanted some busy things to do to take care of the yeast, and didn't want to bother with an approach as difficult as changing your diet. Perhaps you're skeptical that the "normal" or "common" symptoms you're dealing with are anything more than just a "run of the mill (blank)". It's possible that, if your gut health was in excellent shape

right before an *event* that put you in this place (such as antibiotics once in your life, during labor), you can shift your body back into balance with just these measures. **But I gently encourage you to be curious about the philosophies I've pointed you to above, and to give some thought to whether the yeast symptoms you are dealing with are the latest in a long line of signs that there is something imbalanced deeper in your body.** When we constantly keep covering up symptoms by using diaper rash cream, Beeno, Tums, prednisone, etc., we're asking the illness to go deeper because it can no longer express itself through the symptom we're "curing" or covering up.

Some things you can do to support your body in healing thrush symptoms:

- Take a good probiotic. This measure has its best chance at success if you are also addressing the foods in your diet that most easily let the yeast multiply. Otherwise, it's slower-going, hoping the other microorganisms crowd out the yeast. There is some evidence that points to it being impossible for all these helpful microbes in the probiotic to even get a foothold to stay in the gut unless you are also addressing starving out the yeast. If you can tolerate it, [BioKult](#) is the best probiotic, in both strength and diversity . For treating your baby, BioKult makes an infant-specific probiotic called [Restore](#). However, it's grown on small amounts of milk, and I found that my family couldn't tolerate it so we use a powder by [Organic 3](#) and [Optiflora by Shaklee](#).

- Support the immune system. There are myriad ways to do this.

I highly recommend taking Cod Liver Oil. Most brands have the Vit A stripped out and then fake Vit A added back in, which your body can overdose on. There are a few brands that keep the natural form in, and the cheapest of them is [Premier from Radiant Life](#). I recommend the [Weston A Price recommendations for dosage](#), which is higher than what your doctor will recommend.

Other efforts to support the immune system include taking Echinacea tea, dehydrated garlic, exercising regularly, and maintaining a practice that helps you to cope well with stress. The latter two recommendations border on the cliché, but the impact that stress and a sedentary lifestyle has on health is enormous.

- Controlling the spread of the yeast
Most recommendations for thrush only focus on this type of support. Since thrush happens because conditions in the body are creating it, it's like shoveling before it has stopped snowing. However, these measures can help you cope with the symptoms of thrush while you are also addressing the underlying issues.
 - Change breastpads after each feeding
 - Go topless and braless as much as possible. Yeast thrive in a dark, warm, moist environment, so give your breasts a light, dry environment if you can.

- Put olive oil or coconut oil on nipples after each nursing – they are antifungal, and also keep out oxygen, which most yeast need in order to grow.
- Include a lot of plain yogurt in your diet, and put it on your nipples and in baby's mouth
- Gentian violet (1% in solution) on the nipples is the most common holistic approach to thrush. It can be obtained without a prescription. However, it's messiness can't be overstated. It's advisable to wear clothing that can be disposed of while using gentian violet. Gentian violet is used by painting the nipple and baby's mouth twice a day, using only for a maximum of 2-3 days. There are some concerns over a recent study that raised serious concerns about long term safety of using gentian violet. The study linked use of gentian violet with increased risk of oral cancer. Excessive use can also cause ulcerations inside a baby's mouth and throat.
- Some recommendations include spraying the breasts with vinegar or other acidic spray in order to kill the yeast on the breast. While the goal is to decrease the number of yeast on the breast, you can only do this if you take away the conditions that make the yeast grow and multiply. It's impossible to stay ahead of how quickly they grow and multiply, so attempts to only kill it without addressing why they are growing so quickly will not be helpful. Vinegar on nipples that are already irritate can sting and cause more irritation.
- Cease use of antimicrobial soaps. Plain soap and water is just as effective against [pathogens](#), and doesn't lead to antibiotic resistance.
- Severe cases of thrush may benefit from the use of a pharmaceutical fungicide such as Miconazole, Diflucan (fluconazole), Clotrimazole, Nizoral (ketoconazole) or Nystatin. However, it's imperative to remember that drugs do not heal, they merely cover up symptoms. This can be very valuable in making the nursing relationship more comfortable while you address underlying issues. All of these carry different risks for a nursing mother and her baby, so be sure to research the side effects and risks so that you can make an informed decision about whether you are comfortable using the drug. Dr. Jack Newman recommends starting with the most natural approach and gradually bringing in more [allopathic](#) drugs to make a nursing mother more comfortable. You can learn more about his Candida Protocol [here](#).

Prevention Protocol: What to do IMMEDIATELY after having antibiotics

Because having antibiotics during labor is often the straw that breaks the proverbial camel's back on seeing symptoms of yeast overgrowth, it's worthwhile to begin a protocol *immediately* following antibiotic use so that you can better keep your gut

flora diverse and healthy. When you wait to see if you're going to have thrush symptoms, you give the yeast a massive headstart and it's difficult to help the yeast get back into balance after it's already completely overtaken your digestive system.

- Take the equivalent of 8 billion cfu/gram of a probiotic, spread out through the day but **AWAY** from your antibiotic treatment, ideally no later than after the first course of antibiotics. In the case of BioKult, this is a total of 4 capsules, taken twice a day. Continue taking for at least two weeks after completion of the antibiotic course. I recommend having a strong probiotic on-hand before delivery, in case antibiotics are used during the delivery and you need probiotics right away.
- Cut sugar, fruit and honey out of your diet for a few days. This is a weak preventative method for treating a yeast overgrowth by itself, but it can be a strong building block in a program to prevent yeast from getting a strong foothold.

Conclusion

As with anything in life, to address a problem sustainably requires more work and patience than merely hiding the evidence of the problem. It takes a lot of courage to address the root cause of yeast overgrowth, and you may find that you are inundated with advice to treat the symptoms of thrush as if it's the only problem. If you are skeptical about whether the thrush symptoms you are experiencing is a larger problem, try approaching it as a larger yeast issue and see if you notice a remarkable difference. Having this comparison to draw on can give valuable clarity and a boost in morale for what is a more difficult, but also a more holistic, path.

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### **Miscellaneous Notes**

If you are treating the underlying issues in yourself or your family, these odds-and-ends advice that may be helpful.

While on a gut-healing diet, you may find digestive enzymes a helpful addition to your regiment. [Houston digestive enzymes](#) are a great brand that is compatible with these diets. I never saw much of a difference while using the enzymes, but many people do. What I saw the best results with was when our doctor prescribed Nystatin, an antifungal that helped keep the yeast down while the diet helped to heal his gut. We consult over the phone with [Dr. Cowan in San Francisco](#), who is very knowledgeable about gut issues. He's a doctor that studied at Michigan State, and he's amenable to using drugs if they are necessary, but he has a wide variety of therapies that he brings into treatment. He accepts insurance, and also has a sliding scale if you pay cash. He has a [book](#) you can get from the library that is also helpful.

While on the diet, I tried to be careful about drinking chlorinated water. There is no end to things you can worry about on this diet, and I knew a lot of people who were diligent about getting their metal fillings removed, getting all kinds of tests done, etc. However, chlorinated water is important to limit because you're working so hard to get good bacteria in your gut that you don't want something wiping out what you're putting in.

Once we started to come off the diet, I tried to learn everything I could so that we would never get back in bad shape again. I've found these books to be EXTREMELY helpful:

Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon

This book does a great job of explaining nutrition, how our ancestors knew how to prepare food so that it was easier to digest (soaking oatmeal, sprouting nuts, soaking bread dough, etc.) I was surprised to learn how hard a lot of foods are to digest if you don't prepare them correctly. It seemed so odd to me until I mentioned to my Dad about soaking oatmeal overnight before you cook it and he said that his Mom used to do that and he never knew why. I wonder how much of this wisdom has been lost in only 1 generation. I can't recommend this book highly enough.

Wild Fermentation by Sandor Kratz

Sandor Kratz gives some very practical tips on fermenting foods, with a personal story that is a powerful testimony.

["Plants Bite Back"](#) does a good job of explaining some of the protective measures that some plant foods have (which can be hard on digestion and/or assimilation), and what this means for food preparation.

Good Luck!