



National Institute of Dental  
and Craniofacial Research

# Burning Mouth Syndrome



## KEY POINTS

- Burning mouth syndrome (BMS) is burning pain in the mouth that occurs frequently, often every day, for months or longer.
  - Experts believe that BMS is caused by damage to the nerves in the mouth that control pain and taste. Sometimes, other oral or medical conditions such as dry mouth, oral infections, depression, anxiety or stress, hormonal changes (diabetes or thyroid problems), allergies, certain medicines, or nutritional deficiencies can cause a burning sensation in the mouth.
  - BMS can be difficult to diagnose. Your dentist or doctor will rule out other conditions before diagnosing BMS.
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## SYMPTOMS

- Oral pain that feels like burning, scalding, or tingling, or includes numbness, which comes and goes. Additional symptoms may include dry mouth or altered taste.
  - Usually, the tongue is affected but the pain may also be in the lips or roof of the mouth, or throughout the mouth.
  - Oral pain can last for months or years. Some people feel constant pain every day. For others, pain increases throughout the day. For many people, the pain is reduced when eating or drinking.
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## DIAGNOSIS

BMS is hard to diagnose. One reason is that people with BMS often don't have a visible mouth problem that can be seen during an exam.

Talk to your dentist first to rule out oral conditions or habits that can lead to a burning sensation in the mouth and learn how to manage or treat them.

Your dentist may refer you to a specialist in oral surgery, oral medicine, or oral pathology, or an ear, nose, and throat specialist who can assist with diagnosing or treating BMS.

The dentist or doctor will review your medical history and thoroughly examine your mouth. Blood, oral swab, allergy, salivary flow, or imaging tests may be needed to rule out medical problems that can cause burning sensations.

## TREATMENT

Because BMS affects people differently, treatment that works for one person may not work for another. Your health care provider(s) will help you understand your condition, encourage strategies to reduce burning sensations, and may prescribe medicine to help you manage your symptoms.

- Your dentist may help you manage habits, such as tongue hyperactivity (increased tongue movements), that may contribute to BMS.
  - Your dentist or doctor may prescribe medication that can help control pain and relieve dry mouth. Some medications that are used to treat anxiety, depression, and other neurologic disorders can alleviate some of the discomfort caused by BMS. The medications help to reduce the activity of nerve fibers.
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## HELPFUL TIPS

If the burning sensation is due to an underlying medical problem, symptoms should go away when the underlying condition is treated.

For many people, the pain is temporarily reduced when eating or drinking. To help ease the pain, sip a cold beverage, suck on ice chips, or chew sugarless gum.

Avoid irritating substances, such as:

- Tobacco products
- Hot, spicy foods
- Alcoholic beverages
- Mouthwashes that contain alcohol
- Products high in acid, such as citrus fruits and juices

Ask your dentist and doctor for other helpful tips.