LUPUS AND MOUTH ULCERS

Systemic Lupus is a disease that can impact different parts of the body and in up to 85% of lupus patients it affects their skin. This can present as skin rash, hair loss, mouth and nose ulcers and others.

Up to 45% of lupus patients may find that the inside of their mouth and nose (your mucous membranes) may develop ulcers. Mouth ulcers often occur when your disease is active but can also happen when your lupus is inactive. Mouth ulcers often are located on the hard palate (74%), buccal mucosa-cheeks (50%) and on the tongue (34%). Ulcers can also occur in the nose (often on the septum of the nose which is the wall separating the right and left nostrils) and if left untreated might lead to perforation in the septum of the nose. Mouth ulcers tend to be white or silvery and may have some redness around them.

Studies have shown that mouth ulcers from lupus are often painless but painful ulcers have been reported by a large number of patients. It is very important to remember that painful mouth ulcers may not be caused by lupus. They can be caused by an infection, such as oral thrush or oral herpes, or caused by medications, such as methotrexate, or may actually be canker sores. Having lupus and taking immunosupressants can increase your risk of getting infections, including infections in your mouth. Also, ulcers in the mouth can also be related to burns or cut from eating and drinking, from dentures, side effects to anti-inflammatory medications and other reasons. If your mouth ulcers are painful, inform your rheumatologist or family doctor and they may investigate what is causing the painful ulcers.

Your rheumatologist should check your mouth and nose as part of your physical exam during clinic appointments. Knowing the cause of your mouth ulcers is necessary to determine treatment. Treating lupus flares with corticosteroids and immunosupressants will also treat the mouth ulcers. Topical steroids and topical lidocaine (to ease the pain) are often prescribed for lupus related oral and nasal ulcers. However, if the mouth ulcers are caused by an infection, they may need to be treated with oral antiviral or antifungal medications.

See your dentist regularly, practice good oral care to reduce the risk of infection and use a soft tooth brush to avoid causing irritation to the mouth ulcers and bleeding.

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