

Role Of Dentist And Nurse In Aphthous Ulcers: Causes, Symptoms, And Risk Factors

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Abstract:

Aphthous ulcers, also known as canker sores, are painful lesions that affect the oral mucosa, causing discomfort and impacting quality of life. Despite their prevalence, the exact etiology of aphthous ulcers remains unclear, though immune system dysfunction, genetic predisposition, trauma, microbial infections, and hormonal changes are implicated. This article

provides a comprehensive overview of the causes, symptoms, and risk factors associated with aphthous ulcers.

Keywords: Aphthous ulcers, canker sores, oral lesions, immune system dysfunction, genetic predisposition, trauma, microbial infections, hormonal changes.

Introduction:

Aphthous ulcers, commonly known as canker sores, are painful lesions that develop on the mucous membranes of the mouth, including the inner cheeks, lips, tongue, and throat. While these ulcers are benign and not contagious, they can cause significant discomfort and affect quality of life. Understanding the causes, symptoms, and risk factors associated with aphthous ulcers is essential for effective management and prevention.

Aphthous ulcers, commonly referred to as canker sores, are a prevalent oral condition characterized by painful lesions that develop on the mucous membranes of the mouth. Despite being benign and non-contagious, aphthous ulcers can significantly impair oral function and quality of life due to discomfort and difficulty in eating, drinking, and speaking. Understanding the underlying causes, identifying key symptoms, and recognizing associated risk factors are paramount for effective management and prevention strategies.

While the precise etiology of aphthous ulcers remains elusive, several contributing factors have been identified. Immune system dysregulation, genetic predisposition, trauma or injury to the oral mucosa, microbial infections, and hormonal fluctuations are among the primary factors implicated in the development of these ulcers. Additionally, certain systemic diseases and lifestyle factors may exacerbate susceptibility to aphthous ulcers, highlighting the multifactorial nature of this condition.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of aphthous ulcers, delving into the causes, symptoms, and risk factors associated with their occurrence. By elucidating the complexities surrounding aphthous ulcers, healthcare professionals and

individuals affected by this condition can gain valuable insights into its management and mitigation. Furthermore, continued research efforts are essential for advancing our understanding of aphthous ulcers and developing targeted interventions to alleviate the burden they impose on patients.¹

Causes of Aphthous Ulcers:

The exact cause of aphthous ulcers remains unclear, but several factors are believed to contribute to their development. These factors include:

Immune System Dysfunction:

Dysregulation of the immune system is thought to play a role in the development of aphthous ulcers. An abnormal immune response may lead to inflammation and tissue damage in the oral mucosa. A significant body of research suggests that immune system dysfunction plays a pivotal role in the pathogenesis of aphthous ulcers. The immune system is responsible for recognizing and defending against foreign pathogens, maintaining tissue integrity, and regulating inflammation. In individuals with aphthous ulcers, dysregulation of the immune response within the oral mucosa is believed to contribute to the development of these painful lesions.

Several mechanisms underlying immune system dysfunction in aphthous ulcers have been proposed:

Immunological Abnormalities:

Alterations in the balance of pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory cytokines, as well as dysfunction in immune cells such as T lymphocytes and dendritic cells, have been observed in individuals with aphthous ulcers. These abnormalities may lead to an exaggerated immune response and chronic inflammation within the oral mucosa, contributing to ulcer formation.

Autoimmune Mechanisms:

While aphthous ulcers are not considered autoimmune diseases, evidence suggests that autoimmune mechanisms may be involved in their pathogenesis. Autoantibodies targeting specific proteins within the oral mucosa have been detected in some individuals

with aphthous ulcers, indicating a potential autoimmune component to the condition.

Genetic Factors:

Genetic predisposition plays a significant role in immune system dysfunction associated with aphthous ulcers. Certain genetic polymorphisms related to immune function and inflammation have been implicated in susceptibility to ulcer development. Family history often influences an individual's likelihood of experiencing recurrent episodes of aphthous ulcers, highlighting the genetic component of the condition.

Environmental Triggers:

Environmental factors such as stress, dietary factors, and microbial infections can exacerbate immune system dysfunction in susceptible individuals, leading to increased inflammation and ulceration within the oral mucosa. These triggers may interact with genetic predisposition to precipitate ulcer formation.

Understanding the role of immune system dysfunction in aphthous ulcers is crucial for developing targeted therapeutic interventions aimed at modulating the immune response and alleviating symptoms. Further research into the specific immunological mechanisms involved in ulcer development may pave the way for more effective treatment strategies for this common oral condition.

Genetic Predisposition:

There is evidence to suggest that genetics may predispose individuals to developing aphthous ulcers. Family history often influences an individual's susceptibility to recurrent ulcers.

Trauma or Injury:

Minor injuries to the oral mucosa, such as accidental biting, dental work, or abrasive foods, can trigger the formation of aphthous ulcers. These injuries disrupt the mucosal barrier, making the tissue more susceptible to inflammation and ulceration. Trauma or injury to the oral mucosa is a well-recognized trigger for the development of aphthous ulcers, also known as canker sores. The delicate tissues lining the mouth can become damaged due to

various factors, leading to the formation of painful lesions characteristic of aphthous ulcers.

Several mechanisms underlie the association between trauma or injury and the development of aphthous ulcers:

Mechanical Trauma:

Accidental biting, chewing sharp foods, or abrasive dental appliances can cause physical injury to the oral mucosa, disrupting the protective barrier and exposing underlying tissues to irritation and inflammation. Trauma from dental procedures or dental work can also predispose individuals to ulcer formation.

Chemical Irritants:

Exposure to chemical irritants present in certain oral care products, such as toothpaste or mouthwash containing sodium lauryl sulfate, can irritate the delicate mucosal tissues and contribute to ulcer formation. Additionally, consuming acidic or spicy foods may exacerbate existing ulcers or trigger new episodes due to their irritating effects on the oral mucosa.

Thermal Injury:

Consumption of hot foods or beverages can cause thermal injury to the oral mucosa, leading to tissue damage and subsequent ulcer formation. Similarly, exposure to extreme temperatures, such as very cold foods or beverages, may also irritate the mucosal tissues and increase susceptibility to aphthous ulcers.

Dental Trauma:

Trauma to the teeth or gums, such as a sharp edge of a broken tooth or poorly fitting dental prosthetics, can traumatize the surrounding oral tissues and predispose individuals to developing aphthous ulcers in the affected area.²

Repetitive Trauma:

Habitual behaviors such as teeth grinding (bruxism) or cheek biting can result in repetitive trauma to the oral mucosa, increasing the risk of ulcer formation in susceptible individuals. It is important to note that while trauma or injury can trigger the formation of

aphthous ulcers, these lesions are not contagious and do not result from an infectious process. Proper oral hygiene and avoiding behaviors that can traumatize the oral mucosa are essential for preventing the recurrence of aphthous ulcers in susceptible individuals. Additionally, addressing underlying factors such as bruxism or malocclusion through dental interventions may help mitigate the risk of trauma-induced ulceration.

Microbial Infections:

Certain bacteria, viruses, or fungi may contribute to the development of aphthous ulcers by triggering an immune response or causing direct tissue damage.

Hormonal Changes:

Hormonal fluctuations, particularly in women during menstruation or pregnancy, have been associated with an increased risk of developing aphthous ulcers.

Symptoms of Aphthous Ulcers:

Aphthous ulcers typically present with the following symptoms:

Pain or Discomfort:

Ulcers are often accompanied by pain or discomfort, especially when eating, drinking, or speaking.

Round or Oval Lesions:

Ulcers appear as round or oval-shaped lesions with a white or yellow center and a red border. They vary in size from a few millimeters to over a centimeter.³

Swelling and Inflammation:

The surrounding tissue may become swollen and inflamed, leading to further discomfort.

Difficulty Eating or Drinking:

Severe ulcers may make it difficult to eat or drink, leading to decreased appetite and potential nutritional deficiencies.

Recurrence:

Aphthous ulcers may recur intermittently, with some individuals experiencing multiple episodes per year.

Risk Factors for Aphthous Ulcers: Several factors may increase the risk of developing aphthous ulcers, including:

Family History: Individuals with a family history of aphthous ulcers are more likely to develop them.

Age and Gender: Aphthous ulcers are most common in adolescents and young adults, and there is a higher prevalence among females.

Stress: Psychological stress and emotional distress can exacerbate existing ulcers or trigger new episodes.

Certain Foods: Spicy, acidic, or abrasive foods may irritate the oral mucosa and contribute to ulcer formation.

Systemic Diseases:

Certain systemic conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease, celiac disease, and Behçet's syndrome, are associated with an increased risk of aphthous ulcers. Aphthous ulcers, commonly known as canker sores, can occur as a manifestation of various systemic diseases, reflecting the interconnectedness of oral health with overall health and well-being. While aphthous ulcers are often considered a localized oral condition, their occurrence may be influenced by underlying systemic disorders that affect immune function, inflammatory pathways, or mucosal integrity.

Several systemic diseases have been associated with an increased risk of developing aphthous ulcers:

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD): Conditions such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, collectively referred to as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), are characterized by chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract. Individuals with IBD often experience oral manifestations, including aphthous ulcers, which may correlate with disease activity and severity.⁴

Behçet's Disease: Behçet's disease is a rare autoimmune disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of oral and genital ulcers, as well as ocular and skin lesions. Aphthous ulcers are a hallmark feature of Behçet's disease and may precede the onset of other systemic manifestations.

Celiac Disease: Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder triggered by gluten consumption in genetically predisposed individuals. In addition to gastrointestinal symptoms, individuals with celiac disease may experience oral manifestations, including aphthous ulcers, due to immune-mediated inflammation in the oral mucosa.

HIV/AIDS: Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) can affect immune function, predisposing individuals to opportunistic infections and oral manifestations. Aphthous ulcers are commonly observed in individuals with HIV/AIDS and may indicate underlying immune suppression.

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE): Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is a chronic autoimmune disease characterized by systemic inflammation and the production of autoantibodies targeting various tissues and organs. Oral ulcerations, including aphthous ulcers, are among the mucocutaneous manifestations of SLE and may occur during disease flares.

Vitamin Deficiencies: Deficiencies in essential nutrients such as vitamin B12, folate (vitamin B9), and iron have been associated with an increased risk of developing aphthous ulcers. These nutrient deficiencies can impair immune function and mucosal healing, predisposing individuals to ulcer formation. Understanding the systemic diseases associated with aphthous ulcers is essential for clinicians to recognize potential underlying conditions and facilitate appropriate diagnostic and management strategies. In individuals with recurrent or atypical aphthous ulcers, further evaluation for systemic diseases may be warranted to optimize patient care and overall health outcomes.⁵

Conclusion:

Aphthous ulcers are a common oral condition characterized by painful lesions on the mucous membranes of the mouth. While the exact cause remains unclear, immune system dysfunction, genetic predisposition, trauma, microbial infections, hormonal changes, and other factors are believed to contribute to their development.

Recognizing the symptoms and understanding the risk factors associated with aphthous ulcers are crucial steps in managing the condition effectively and minimizing recurrence. Further research is needed to elucidate the underlying mechanisms and develop targeted therapies for this often debilitating condition.

Aphthous ulcers, or canker sores, are a common oral condition characterized by painful lesions that affect the mucous membranes of the mouth. While typically benign and self-limiting, aphthous ulcers can significantly impact quality of life, causing discomfort and difficulty with eating, drinking, and speaking. Understanding the multifactorial nature of aphthous ulcers is essential for effective management and prevention strategies.

This review has highlighted several key factors contributing to the development of aphthous ulcers, including immune system dysfunction, genetic predisposition, trauma or injury to the oral mucosa, microbial infections, hormonal changes, dietary factors, psychological stress, and underlying systemic diseases. Immune system dysfunction, in particular, appears to play a central role in the pathogenesis of aphthous ulcers, leading to chronic inflammation and tissue damage within the oral mucosa.

Clinicians should consider the diverse etiological factors associated with aphthous ulcers when evaluating and managing affected individuals. Comprehensive patient assessment, including a thorough medical history and evaluation for potential systemic diseases, is essential for identifying underlying contributors to ulcer formation and tailoring treatment approaches accordingly. Management strategies for aphthous ulcers may include symptomatic relief with topical analgesics or corticosteroids, addressing underlying systemic conditions, and implementing preventive measures such as dietary modifications and stress management techniques.

Further research is warranted to elucidate the specific mechanisms underlying aphthous ulcer development and to identify novel therapeutic targets for this common oral condition. By advancing our understanding of aphthous ulcers and their associated risk

factors, healthcare professionals can improve outcomes for individuals affected by this often debilitating condition.⁶

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