

What is Candida?

Candida, also called Candidiasis, is a fungal infection that occurs when a person has an overgrowth of detrimental yeast/bacteria (*Candida albicans*). Once candida takes hold it multiplies throughout the digestive tract leading to intestinal dysbiosis (imbalance between healthy and unhealthy gut bacteria) and a wide range of health problems.

The following factors can contribute to the development of Candida.

1. Weakened immune function

This allows the candida to opportunistically invade the body via absorption from the intestinal tract into the blood stream where it further depletes immune functioning. A person's immune system may be weak due to genetic causes, or because of certain medications such as corticosteroids, chronic infections, poor nutrition (junk food), a long illness, loneliness and stress, lifestyle choices including alcohol use, smoking or lack of exercise.

2. Dietary factors

Because candida is a type of yeast infection, it can feed off dried fruits, honey, maple syrup, sugar and other refined carbohydrates such as white flour products, pasta and white rice; therefore, a diet high in these will facilitate and exacerbate a candida overgrowth. To add insult to injury, the end by-products of sugar metabolism by the candida which are ethanol, acetaldehyde and carbon dioxide, are highly toxic to the body. Any foods that readily grow mould such as mushrooms, peanuts and yeast-containing breads will also feed candida.

The cumulative negative effects of candida overgrowth throughout the digestive tract (stomach, small and large intestines) prevent the absorption of important vitamins, minerals and protein from our food, which leads to overall diminished wellbeing due to nutritional deficiencies, poor tissue repair and depleted energy levels. Unless addressed these deficiencies will worsen over time.

3. Hormonal or glandular causes

Any alteration in the balance of hormones such as puberty, menstruation, pre-menstrual syndrome, pregnancy, oral contraceptive use or other hormonal-based therapies, and diabetes, can encourage candida overgrowth. Females are more

susceptible due to fluctuations in their hormone levels and frequently prescribed medications.

If a person's adrenal glands are under-functioning, then a condition called adrenal fatigue can develop and contribute to a candida overgrowth by weakening the immune system. Some contributing causes to adrenal fatigue include stress – either ongoing or a significant life event, too much sugar in the diet, being overweight, lack of sleep or a chronic health condition. You may be experiencing adrenal fatigue if you experience the following signs and symptoms: Aching body and fatigue, craving salty food, low blood pressure and light headedness, weight gain, insomnia, hair loss, skin discoloration and increased energy levels in the evening.

4. Protozoa/Amoeba parasite infection

In cases of persistent, difficult to treat candida, this type of infection may be the underlying cause. These parasites can enter the body via contaminated drinking water or meats and can lie dormant for many years. Once they begin multiplying, they destroy not only healthy gut flora, but also the absorptive mechanisms (villi and micro-villi) lining the small intestine (the small intestine is where most of the goodness from the food we eat is absorbed). Damage to the villi can lead to nutrient depletion, alternating constipation and diarrhoea, and irritation and discomfort of the gut lining.

5. Lack of friendly, healthy bacteria in the digestive tract

This is the major cause of a candida overgrowth in our body. In a healthy gut, candida is normally kept in check by populations of friendly bacteria (flora) predominantly *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Bifidobacteria bifidus*. We need approximately three to four pounds of these good guys living permanently in our gut keeping things clean and clear. We just cannot live without them; they fight and destroy invading microorganisms (bad guys) and they keep the unfriendly bacteria, yeasts and parasites at low levels. The friendly flora does all this mainly by producing lactic acid and some other substances that prevent unwanted overgrowths. Another vital role of these friendly bacteria superstars is the synthesis of B complex vitamins – necessary for energy, emotional stability, healthy hair and red blood cell production and vitamin K (for blood clotting).

Clearly, if numbers of healthy flora are insufficient due to any of the above-mentioned causes, or broad-spectrum antibiotic use, the intake of chemicals

such as chlorine, certain diseases, or emotional stress and negativity, our overall health and wellbeing is, without a doubt, going to suffer.

Signs and symptoms of candidiasis

1. Oral Thrush – this is when candidiasis develops in the mouth or throat. It is often seen in new-borns, the elderly, and individuals with a weakened immune system or poor oral hygiene.
2. Fatigue – this is one of the most common symptoms and is likely due to nutrient deficiencies, toxic overload and a weakened immune system.
3. Frequent candida/thrush of the genitals and urinary tract infections.
4. Digestive problems including constipation, diarrhoea, nausea, bloating, cramping and excess gas.
5. Stubborn and recurring sinus Infections
6. Skin and nail fungal infections including athletes' foot, ringworm and nail fungal infections.
7. Joint Pain – a systemic candida overgrowth will be in the bloodstream and can adversely affect joints causing stiffness, swelling and discomfort.