Dear Alice,

Last week I had a cup of morning coffee and, silly me, I ended up burning my tongue. Now I have small white spots and redness all around the end of my tongue and it hurts. Is there any medication I can put on it to relieve the pain and redness? Thank you.

Answer

Dear Reader,

The medical term for tongue irritation and swelling is glossitis. This covers all tongue trouble ranging from encounters with hot coffee and bacterial infections, to clumsy dates with sharp braces. Unfortunately, while your condition is easily named, it's less easily fixed. Applying ice right after the burn will make the injury less severe and painful (NEVER apply ice directly to burns that result in charred, blackened tissue ? seek immediate medical attention for those).

You can put an over-the-counter cold sore medication or an anesthetic mouthwash on your tongue to numb it until it heals. Many of these medications are also antiseptic, keeping your burn from getting infected. Avoid using any numbing medicine before meals ? chomping on a numb tongue will have you slurring your words and slurping applesauce for a while. Be patient, stock up on ice pops, and, within a week, your tongue will be untied from its burn symptoms. Although annoying and painful, tongue injuries tend to heal quickly, probably because they can interfere with eating and drinking ? just one more way that our bodies can take care of us automatically.

Your tale is a reminder to check the temperature (if possible) of foods and drinks about to pass our lips. These temps can vary greatly, and establishments that serve hot lava beverages might benefit from some cool customer feedback!

Hoping things cool off soon!

Alice!

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