

Vaginal Infections

Vaginal infections are the most common reason American females see their doctors. Vaginal infections result in vaginitis (swelling of the vagina).



Signs, Symptoms, and Causes

For Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

Nearly half of females with clinical signs of BV report no symptoms. When present, symptoms include:

- A thin, gray, or milky white vaginal discharge. This has a fishy odor, which is more noted after intercourse.
- Mild vaginal irritation or burning.

Bacterial vaginosis results when certain bacteria outnumber normal and protective bacteria in the vagina. The exact cause is not known.

Risk factors for BV include douching, using an IUD, and a change or an increase in sexual partners.

For Vaginal Yeast Infections

Vaginal yeast infections are also called Monilia, *Candida*, and fungal infections. Signs and symptoms range from mild to severe. They include:

- Thick, white vaginal discharge that looks like cottage cheese and may smell like yeast.
- Itching, irritation, and redness around the vagina.
- Burning and/or pain when urinating or with sex.

Vaginal yeast infections result from the overgrowth of the fungus *Candida*. This is normally present in harmless amounts in the vagina, digestive tract, and mouth.

Risk Factors for Vaginal Yeast Infections

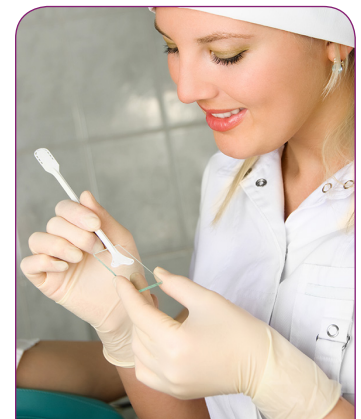
- Hormonal changes that come with pregnancy or monthly periods. Taking hormones or birth control pills.
- Antibiotic use, especially “broad spectrum” ones. Corticosteroid medicine use.
- High blood sugar. This can occur when diabetes is not controlled.
- Sex that irritates the vagina a lot.
- Using douches. Using feminine hygiene sprays.
- Using hot tubs and jacuzzis a lot.

Chronic vaginal yeast infections can be one of the first signs of diabetes, STIs, and HIV.

{**Note:** Vaginal infections can also be caused by STIs. See at www.HealthyLearn.com.}

Diagnosis

Different vaginal infections have the same symptoms. This makes it hard to tell one from another. A doctor may need to diagnose the cause. A sample of vaginal fluid is taken and tested. Often, this takes less than 3 minutes.



Testing a sample of vaginal fluid diagnoses the cause of a vaginal infection.

Vaginal Infections, continued

Treatment

For Bacterial Vaginosis

Prescribed antibiotic creams, gels, or pills are needed. Male sex partner(s) may also need treatment. Feminine hygiene sprays that mask vaginal odor should not be used. Nor should OTC medications, such as ones for vaginal yeast infections. These **do not** treat BV.

For Vaginal Yeast Infections

Prescribed and OTC vaginal creams or suppositories get rid of the *Candida* overgrowth. Oral medicines, such as Diflucan®, may be prescribed.

Questions to Ask

Do you have **signs and symptoms of bacterial vaginosis** listed on previous page?

YES



NO

Does your skin and/or the whites of your eyes look yellow after you took a prescribed, oral antifungal medicine?

YES



NO

With symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection, do any of these apply?

- This is the first time you have these symptoms or you are not sure that your problem is a yeast infection.
- An infection was treated, but came back within 2 months.
- After using self-care for 3 days, symptoms don't improve. Or, they worsen or last 1 week or longer.

YES



NO



See Self-Care in next column

Self-Care / Prevention

- Take medications, as prescribed.
- For a repeat vaginal yeast infection, use an over-the-counter (OTC) antifungal vaginal medication, such as Monistat. Use it as directed. {**Note:** Stop using any OTC product for a vaginal yeast infection at least 24 hours before a vaginal exam.}
- Ask your pharmacist about an OTC cream for itching and burning to help with symptoms during treatment.
- Bathe or shower often. Clean the inside folds of the vulva. Dry the vaginal area well.
- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet.
- If your vagina is dry, use a water soluble lubricant, such as K-Y Liquid®, when you have sex.
- Wear all-cotton underwear. Don't wear garments that are tight in the crotch. Change underwear and workout clothes as soon as possible after you sweat.
- Don't use bath oils, bubble baths, feminine hygiene sprays, or perfumed or deodorant soaps.
- Don't sit around in a wet bathing suit. Shower after you swim in a pool to remove the chlorine from your skin. Dry the vaginal area well.
- Eat well. Limit sugar and foods with sugar. Eat foods, such as yogurt, that contain live cultures of "lactobacillus acidophilus." If you can't tolerate yogurt, take an OTC product that has this.
- Let your doctor know if you are prone to getting yeast infections whenever you take an antibiotic. You may be told to also use a vaginal antifungal product.
- If you still menstruate, use unscented tampons or sanitary pads and change them often.

See, also, "**To Treat STIs – For Genital Herpes**" at www.HealthyLearn.com.