

Vaginal Yeast Infection

A vaginal yeast infection is an infection of the vagina, most commonly due to the fungus *Candida albicans*.

Causes, incidence, and risk factors

Most women have a vaginal yeast infection at some time. *Candida albicans* is a common type of fungus. It is often found in small amounts in the vagina, mouth, digestive tracts, and on the skin. Usually it does not cause disease or symptoms. *Candida* and the many other germs that normally live in the vagina keep each other in balance. However, sometimes the number of *Candida albicans* increases, leading to a yeast infection.

A yeast infection can happen if you are:

- Taking antibiotics used to treat other types of infections. Antibiotics change the normal balance between germs in the vagina by decreasing the number of protective bacteria.
- Pregnant
- Obese
- Have diabetes

A yeast infection is not a sexually transmitted illness. However, some men will develop symptoms such as itching and a rash on the penis after having sexual contact with an infected partner.

Having many vaginal yeast infections may be a sign of other health problems. Other vaginal infections and discharges can be mistaken for vaginal yeast infection.

Symptoms

- Pain with intercourse
- Painful urination
- Redness and swelling of the vulva
- Vaginal and labial itching, burning
- Abnormal Vaginal Discharge
- Ranges from a slightly watery, white discharge to a thick, white, chunky discharge (like cottage cheese)

Signs and Tests

A pelvic examination will be done. It may show swelling and redness of the skin of the vulva, in the vagina, and on the cervix. The healthcare provider may find dry, white spots on the vaginal wall. There may be cracks in the skin of the vulva. A small amount of the vaginal discharge is examined using a microscope. This is called a wet mount and KOH test. Sometimes, a culture is taken when the infection does not improve with treatment or comes back many times. Your healthcare provider may order other tests to rule out the causes of your symptoms.

Treatment

Medications to treat vaginal yeast infections are available in either creams or suppositories. Most can be bought without a prescription. Treating yourself at home is okay if:

- Your symptoms are mild and you do not have pelvic pain or a fever
- This is not your first yeast infection and you have not had many yeast infections in the past
- You are not pregnant
- You are not worried about other sexually transmitted diseases from recent sexual contact
- Medications you can buy over the counter at a pharmacy to treat a vaginal yeast infection are:
 - Miconazole
 - Clotrimazole
 - Tioconazole
 - Butoconazole

Read the packages carefully and use them as directed. Do not stop using these medications early because your symptoms are better. You will need to take the medicine for 3-7 days, depending on which medicine you buy. If you do not get repeated infections, a 1-day medicine might work for you.

Your healthcare provider can also prescribe a medicine called fluconazole. This medicine is a pill that you only take once.

To help prevent and treat vaginal discharge:

- Keep your genital area clean and dry. Avoid soap and rinse with water only. Sitting in a warm, but not hot, bath may help your symptoms.
- Avoid douching. Although many women feel cleaner if they douche after menstruation or intercourse, it may actually worsen vaginal discharge because it removes healthy bacteria lining the vagina that protect against infection.
- Eat yogurt with live cultures or take Lactobacillus acidophilus tablets when you are on antibiotics to prevent a yeast infection.
- Use condoms to avoid catching or spreading sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Avoid using feminine hygiene sprays, fragrances, or powders in the genital area.
- Avoid wearing extremely tight-fitting pants or shorts, which may cause irritation.
- Wear cotton underwear or cotton-crotch pantyhose. Avoid underwear made of silk or nylon, because these materials are not very absorbent and restrict air flow. This can increase sweating in the genital area, which can cause irritation.
- Use pads and not tampons.
- Keep your blood sugar levels under good control if you have diabetes

Complications

Chronic or recurrent infections may occur if you do not get the proper treatment or have an underlying medical condition. It is important for your provider to check you for diseases that can lead to yeast infections, such as diabetes. A lot of scratching may cause the skin to crack, making you more likely to get an infection. Repeat infections occurring immediately after treatment may be an early sign of HIV.

Call your health care provider if:

- This is the first time that you have symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection
- You are not sure if you have a yeast infection
- Your symptoms do not go away after using over-the-counter medications
- Your symptoms get worse while on treatment or after completing the treatment
- You develop other symptoms such as fever, increased pain in genital area, or pain in lower abdomen