



Vaginal infections

Vaginal infections are very common. Vaginal infections result in vaginitis (swelling of the vagina).



SIGNS, SYMPTOMS, & CAUSES

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

Most 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.
- Itching around the outside of the vagina.
- 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.



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, swelling 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

Vaginal Yeast Infections

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

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



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.



TREATMENT

Bacterial Vaginosis

Prescribed antibiotic creams, gels or pills are needed. Male sex partner(s) won't need treatment but a female sex partner may need treatment. Do not take over-the-counter (OTC) medications, such as ones for vaginal yeast infections. These **do not** treat BV.



TRIAGE QUESTIONS

Do you have signs and symptoms of bacterial vaginosis?

NO **YES**  **SEE DOCTOR**

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

NO **YES**  **SEE DOCTOR**

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.

NO **YES**  **SEE DOCTOR**

USE SELF-CARE

Vaginal Yeast Infections

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



SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

- Take medications, as prescribed.
- For a repeat vaginal yeast infection, use an 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. Limiting sugar and foods with sugar may help. Eat foods, like 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 need to use a vaginal antifungal product.
- If you still menstruate, use unscented tampons or sanitary pads and change them often.