

Vaginal yeast infection

A vaginal yeast infection is an infection of the vagina that causes itching and burning of the vulva, the area around the vagina. Three out of four women will have a yeast infection at some point in their life. Yeast infections are easy to treat, but it is important to see your doctor or nurse if you think you have an infection.

Q: Are some women more at risk for yeast infections?

A: Women and girls of all ages can get yeast infections, but they are rare before puberty and after menopause.

Your risk for vaginal yeast infections is higher if:

- You are pregnant
- You have diabetes and your blood sugar is not under control
- You use a type of hormonal birth control that has higher doses of estrogen
- You douche or use vaginal sprays
- You recently took antibiotics such as amoxicillin or steroid medicines
- You have a weakened immune system, such as from HIV

Q: What are the signs and symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection?

A: The most common symptom of a yeast infection is extreme itchiness in and around the vagina.

Other signs and symptoms include:

- Burning, redness, and swelling of the vagina and the vulva
- Pain when urinating

- Pain during sex
- Soreness
- A thick, white vaginal discharge that looks like cottage cheese and does not have a bad smell

You may only have a few of these symptoms. They may be mild or severe.

Q: Should I call my doctor if I think I have a yeast infection?

A: Yes. Seeing your doctor is the only way to know for sure if you have a yeast infection. The signs and symptoms of a yeast infection are a lot like symptoms of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and bacterial vaginosis (BV). If left untreated, STIs and BV can raise your risk of getting other STIs, including HIV, and can lead to problems getting pregnant. BV can also lead to problems during pregnancy, such as premature delivery.

Q: How are yeast infections treated?

A: Yeast infections are usually treated with antifungal medicine. See your doctor or nurse to make sure that you have a vaginal yeast infection and not another type of infection.

You can then buy antifungal medicine for yeast infections at a store, without a prescription. Antifungal medicines come in the form of creams, tablets, ointments, or suppositories that you insert into your vagina. You can apply treatment in one dose or daily for up to seven days, depending on the brand you choose. Your doctor can also give you a single dose of antifungal medicine taken by mouth, such as fluconazole.

Q: If I have a yeast infection, does my sexual partner need to be treated?

A: Maybe. It is possible to pass yeast infections to your partner during vaginal, oral, or anal sex.

- **If your partner is a man**, the risk of infection is low. Some men get an itchy rash on their penis. If this happens to your partner, he should see a doctor.
- **If your partner is a woman**, she may be at risk. She should be tested and treated if she has any symptoms.

Q: How can I avoid getting another yeast infection?

A: You can take steps to lower your risk of getting yeast infections:

- Do not douche. Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protects you from infection.

- Do not use scented feminine products, including bubble bath, sprays, pads, and tampons.
- Change tampons, pads, and pantyliners often.
- Do not wear tight underwear, pantyhose, pants, or jeans. These can increase body heat and moisture in your genital area.
- Wear underwear with a cotton crotch.
- Change out of wet swimsuits and workout clothes as soon as you can.
- After using the bathroom, always wipe from front to back.
- Avoid hot tubs and very hot baths
- If you have diabetes, be sure your blood sugar is under control.

For more information...

For more information on vaginal yeast infections, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HHS
800-232-4636 • www.cdc.gov

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), NIH, HHS
866-284-4107 (TDD: 800-877-8339) • www.niaid.nih.gov

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)
800-673-8444 • www.acog.org

Planned Parenthood Federation of America
800-230-7526 • www.plannedparenthood.org

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