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1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Vaginal Yeast Infections

Q: What is a vaginal yeast infection?

A: A vaginal yeast infection is irritation of the vagina and the area around the vulva. It is caused by an overgrowth of the fungus or yeast *Candida*. Yeast normally live in the vagina in small numbers, but when the bacteria in the vagina become out of balance, too many yeast grow and cause an infection.

Vaginal yeast infections are very common. About 75 percent of women have a yeast infection during their lives. And almost half of women have two or more yeast infections.

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

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

- Burning, redness, and swelling of the vagina and the area around it
- Pain when urinating
- Pain or discomfort during sex
- 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 and they may be mild or severe.

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

A: Yes, you need to see your doctor to know for sure if you have a yeast infection, especially if you've never had one before. The signs of a yeast infection are similar to those of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like chlamydia and gonorrhea. So, it's hard to be sure you have a yeast infection and not something more serious.

If you've had vaginal yeast infections in the past, talk to your doctor about using over-the-counter medicines.

Q: How is a vaginal yeast infection diagnosed?

A: Your doctor will do a pelvic exam to look for swelling and discharge. She may also use a swab to take a sample from the vagina. A quick look under the microscope or a lab test will show if yeast is causing the problem.

Q: Why did I get a yeast infection?

A: Many things can change the acidity of the vagina and boost your chances of a vaginal yeast infection. These include:

- stress
- lack of sleep
- sickness
- poor diet, or extreme intake of sugary foods
- pregnancy
- having your period
- taking birth control pills
- taking antibiotics
- taking steroid medicines
- diseases such as poorly-controlled diabetes and HIV infection



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Q: Can I get a yeast infection from having sex?

A: Yes, but it is rare. Women usually do not get yeast infections from sex. Instead, a weakened immune system is the most common cause of yeast infections.

Q: How are yeast infections treated?

A: Yeast infections can be cured with antifungal medicines in the form of creams, tablets, ointments or suppositories that are inserted into the vagina. These medicines include butoconazole, clotrimazole, miconazole, nystatin, tioconazole and terconazole. These products can be bought over-the-counter at the drug store or grocery store. Your doctor can also prescribe you a single dose of oral fluconazole.

Infections that do not respond to these medicines are becoming more common. Using antifungal medicines when you don't really have a yeast infection can boost your risk of getting a hard-to-treat infection in the future.

Q: Is it safe to use over-the-counter medicines for yeast infections?

A: Yes, but it is important to talk to your doctor first. Always call your doctor before treating yourself for a vaginal yeast infection if:

- you are pregnant
- you have never been diagnosed with a yeast infection
- you are having repeat yeast infections

Studies show that two thirds of women who buy these products do not really have a yeast infection. Using these medicines incorrectly may lead to a

hard-to-treat infection. Plus, treating yourself for a yeast infection when you really have another kind of infection may worsen the problem.

If you decide to use these over-the-counter medicines, be sure to read and follow the directions carefully. Some creams and inserts may weaken condoms and diaphragms.

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

A: Not unless he shows signs of a yeast infection. Rarely, men who have sex with women with yeast infections will get an itchy rash on their penis. If this happens, he should see his doctor.

Q: What should I do if I get repeat yeast infections?

A: Call your doctor. About five percent of women develop four or more vaginal yeast infections in one year. This is called recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis (RVVC). RVVC is more common in women with diabetes or weakened immune systems. Doctors normally treat this problem with antifungal medicine for up to six months.

Q: How can I avoid getting another yeast infection?

A: To help prevent vaginal yeast infections, try the following:

- Don't use douches.
- Avoid scented hygiene products like bubble bath, sprays, pads and tampons.
- Change tampons and pads often during your period.



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- Don't wear tight underwear or clothes made of synthetic fibers.
 - Wear cotton underwear and pantyhose with a cotton crotch.
 - Change out of wet swimsuits and exercise clothes as soon as possible.
- If you have repeat yeast infections, talk to your doctor. ■

For more information...

For more information on yeast infections, call the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 1-800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Phone Number (s): (800) 448-0440

Internet Address:

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone Number (s): (800) 311-3435

(Public Inquiries) or (888) 232-3228
(Information Request System)

Internet Address: <http://www.cdc.gov>

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Phone Number (s): (202) 863-2518 or

(800) 762-2264 x 192 (for publications requests only)

Internet Address: <http://www.acog.org>

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Phone Number: (800) 230-7526

Internet Address:

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

This information was adapted from fact sheets from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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