

COMMON VAGINAL INFECTIONS

BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS (also called BV or Gardnerella) is the MOST COMMON vaginal infection in women ages 15 to 44. Bacterial Vaginosis is caused by an over-growth of the bacteria normally found in the vagina. BV is not considered an STD, but is associated with sexual activity--the more partners you have, the greater your risk of getting BV. Symptoms may include a fishy-smelling discharge (especially after sex), frothy clear or white discharge, itching and/or burning. About half of the women with this type of infection do not have any symptoms. Treatment consists of an antibiotic given either by mouth or as a cream in the vagina. Untreated, BV can cause premature labor/delivery, Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), and infertility. Typically, sex partners do not need treatment; however condoms are highly recommended.

YEAST (also called Candida or Manilla) infections are the second most common type of vaginal infection. Pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, birth control pills, diabetes, and antibiotic medications can be contributing factors. Symptoms may include itching and/or a burning sensation in and around the vagina that ranges from mild to severe. Burning may increase with urination. The vaginal discharge tends to be white, clumped and cottage cheese like in appearance. Since yeast infections are not considered sexually transmitted infections; the sex partner usually does not require treatment. Treatment consists of an anti-fungal medication used in the vagina or a pill taken by mouth.

TRICHOMONAS (also called Trich) is the third most common vaginal infection. It is sexually transmitted by a parasite and causes heavy, sometimes foul smelling vaginal discharge that can be clear, white, greenish, or yellow in color. Burning or itching may also occur. Treatment consists of a medication called Metronidazole (Flagyl), which can be used by pregnant women in the first trimester if there is no alternative antibiotic. To be effective, the medicine must be taken by the woman and her sex partner(s) during the same time period. Untreated Trichomonas infections are associated with preterm delivery, premature rupture of membranes and low birth weight. Do not drink alcohol for 24 hours after taking this drug because it causes nausea and vomiting.

CHLAMYDIA is one of the most common; curable sexually transmitted infections (STD). This infection is spread by sexual contact with another person or from the mother to the child during birth. Chlamydia CANNOT be caused by casual contact (toilet seats, hot tubs, saunas, or swimming pools). Chlamydia infections are often overlooked because the symptoms are very mild and can be mistaken for a UTI or are totally absent. If symptoms are present they may include irregular vaginal bleeding, pain or burning with urination or sex, vaginal discharge, or lower abdominal pain and fever. A person can have the infection, not have symptoms, and transmit it to someone else without knowing it. The diagnosis of chlamydia is made through laboratory tests. Your health care provider may ask you to provide a urine sample or may use a cotton swab to get a sample from your vagina to test for chlamydia. The treatment for chlamydia is oral. Untreated chlamydia can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) in the female which can lead to infertility (sterility). Pregnant women with untreated chlamydia are at risk for premature labor. **Babies born to mothers with this infection can get pneumonia and a severe infection of the eyes.**

GONORRHEA (also called the Clap or Drip) is another infection that is transmitted by sexual contact. Gonorrhea can also be spread from the mother to the child during birth. Most women DO NOT have symptoms or only very mild symptoms like a heavier vaginal discharge with or without burning. A person with gonorrhea can spread the disease even without having symptoms. The diagnosis of gonorrhea is made through laboratory tests. Your health care provider may ask you to provide a urine sample or may use a cotton swab to get a sample from your vagina to test for gonorrhea. This infection is most often treated with a combination of oral and intramuscular antibiotics. If left untreated, gonorrhea can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), which can lead to infertility (sterility). In rare situations, it can also spread to your blood or joints causing arthritis, skin infections, and other organ infections. **Pregnant women can pass the infection to their baby during delivery causing severe infection of the eyes.**

ALLERGIC VAGINITIS is a reaction to chemical irritants, soaps, perfumes, spermicides, or less commonly latex. Symptoms include burning, itching, redness, and swelling in and around the vagina. Diagnosis is based on history and ruling out other causes. Treatment consists of avoidance of the product causing the reaction, cool compresses, and or sitz baths. Rarely, a steroid cream may be prescribed by your clinician. If the allergy is due to spermicides or latex, an alternate method of contraceptive may be needed. Non-latex condoms are available that are made from polyurethane and can safely be used.

ATROPHIC VAGINITIS is a condition that occurs when estrogen hormone levels are low such as during breastfeeding and during or after menopause. Symptoms include itching, dryness, and redness. There may be discomfort with sex. Treatment may consist of using Vitamin E or a non-hormonal cream (such as Replens). Menopausal women may be treated with a low-dose estrogen by mouth or as a vaginal cream, or vaginal ring. A water-soluble lubricant during sex may also help.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF VAGINAL INFECTIONS

1. Faithfully use condoms with sexual intercourse (male and female condoms are available) to prevent sexually transmitted infections. Pregnant women at risk for infection should use condoms during intercourse for the remainder of the pregnancy.
2. Limit your number of sex partners: The more partners you have the greater the risk of all infections.
3. AVOID DOUCHING as it disrupts the normal vaginal environment and may lead to infections.
4. After using the bathroom, always wipe from FRONT to BACK and wash your hands afterwards.
5. Avoid feminine hygiene sprays, deodorant pads and tampons, perfumed soaps, bubble baths, and talc.
6. Wear clean, cotton panties and don't forget basic hygiene (bathe or shower daily).
7. Report all symptoms of an abnormal vaginal discharge to your health care provider.
8. If you think you may be at risk for a sexually transmitted infection (STD), tell your provider.
9. Ask questions if you are concerned over your symptoms and/or risk of infection.

Regardless of which of the vaginal infections you have been diagnosed with, it is essential to follow your health care provider's advice and COMPLETE the prescribed treatment!

References:

1. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists FAQ: Gynecologic Problems <https://www.acog.org/~/media/For%20Patients/faq071.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20140331T1536218229>
2. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists FAQ: Gynecologic Problems <https://www.acog.org/~/media/For%20Patients/faq009.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20140331T1536218326>
3. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists FAQ: Gynecologic Problems <https://www.acog.org/~/media/For%20Patients/faq028.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20140331T1536218922>
4. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/bv/default.htm>