

Health Information Sheet

What to Do About Vaginal Yeast Infections

What is a vaginal yeast infection?

Vaginal yeast infections are caused by a fungus called *Candida albicans*. Yeast infections can be very uncomfortable. Symptoms include the following:

- Itching and burning in the vagina and around the outside of the vagina (the vulva, the "lips" of skin that surround your vagina)
- A white vaginal discharge that looks like cottage cheese
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Swelling of the vulva

Yeast infections are so common that three-fourths of all women will have one at some time in their lives. Half of women have more than one infection in their lives. If you have symptoms of a yeast infection, your doctor will probably want to talk to you about your symptoms and examine you to make sure a yeast infection is the cause of your symptoms.

What causes vaginal yeast infections?

Yeast are tiny organisms that normally live in small numbers on the skin and inside the vagina. The acidic environment of the vagina helps keep yeast from growing. If the vagina becomes less acidic, too many yeast can grow and cause a vaginal infection.

The acidic environment of the vagina can be changed by menstruation, pregnancy, some antibiotics, oral contraceptives, steroids and diabetes. Moisture and irritation of the vagina also seem to encourage yeast to grow.

How are these infections treated?

Yeast infections are usually treated with medicine that you put into your vagina. This medicine may be a cream that you put into your vagina with a special plunger, or it may be a special pill, called a suppository, that you put into your vagina. Medicine in a cream form can also be put on your vulva to help relieve the itching on the outside. A medicine in a pill form that you take by mouth is also available.

Should I see my doctor every time I have a yeast infection?

Be sure to see your doctor the first time you have symptoms of a yeast infection. It's very important to make sure you

have a yeast infection before you start taking medicine. The symptoms of a yeast infection can also be the symptoms of other infections. Treating yourself for a yeast infection when you actually have another type of infection may make the problem much worse.

If you have often been diagnosed with yeast infections, talk to your doctor about using a medicine you can buy without a prescription. Some of these medicines include miconazole (Monistat) and clotrimazole (Gyne-Lotrimin, Mycelex).

How can I avoid getting another infection?

Here are things you can do to help prevent another yeast infection:

- Don't wear tight-fitting or synthetic-fiber clothes.
- Wear cotton panties. •Don't wear pantyhose or leotards every day.
- Use your blow dryer on a low setting to help dry your genital area after you bathe or shower and before getting dressed.
- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet. This may help prevent the bacteria that normally live in your rectum from getting into your vagina.
- Change out of wet swimsuits or other damp clothes as soon as you can. •Reduce the amount of sweets, alcohol and caffeine in your diet.
- Don't douche or use feminine hygiene sprays, deodorant sanitary pads or tampons, or bubble bath, and avoid using colored or perfumed toilet paper. These items seem to affect the pH balance of the vagina and can lead to symptoms of yeast infection.

This information provides a general overview on vaginal yeast infections and may not apply to everyone. Physicians