

Yeast Infections

Candida albicans, and other forms of yeast, grow in the vagina, rectum, and mouth. In a healthy vagina, the presence of some yeast may not be a problem. When a woman's system is out of balance, yeast-like organisms can grow profusely and cause a thick, white discharge. A yeast infection is not necessarily an sexually transmitted infection (STI); however, treating a woman and her sexual partner may help prevent recurrent yeast infections.

PREVALENCE

Yeast infections are the second most common type of vaginal infection women experience (bacterial vaginosis is the most common). Over 70% of women develop at least one yeast infection during their life and over 40% of women have had more than one infection.

CAUSES

Factors that may disturb the vagina's balance include:

- Antibiotic treatments
- Oral contraceptives
- Hot weather or non-ventilating clothing, which increase moisture and warmth, fostering fungal growth
- Repeated intercourse over a short period of time
- Stress, pregnancy, diabetes
- Suppressed immune system (including HIV)
- High carbohydrate intake, especially refined sugars and alcohol
- Irritants such as soaps, powders, new detergents

SYMPTOMS

- Vaginal itching
- Vaginal irritation
- Thick, white, possibly curd-like vaginal discharge
- Redness, swelling, and/or cracking of the vulvar skin
- Burning sensation during urination
- Itching of the rectal opening
- Pain during sexual intercourse.

Yeast infections can cause severe discomfort but rarely cause serious health problems. Left untreated, vaginal yeast infections often clear up on their own, usually when menstruation begins. Recurring yeast infections may be difficult to prevent or cure. There are significant differences between occasional, easily treatable yeast infections and recurring infections that seriously affect a woman's life. Women who have recurring yeast infections should be tested for underlying causes.

Men can contract a yeast infection if they have unprotected sexual activity with a partner who has a yeast infection. If both partners are not treated, they can keep re-infecting each other. Male sexual partners can develop genital irritation and genital itching, especially if they are uncircumcised.

DIAGNOSIS

Yeast infections should be diagnosed and treated by a medical professional. There are over-the-counter medications available for women who have had professional guidance about how to recognize the symptoms.

Your health care provider can determine if you have a yeast infection or a more serious infection or condition such as chlamydia or gonorrhea. To diagnose a yeast infection, your health care provider will perform a vaginal exam. Samples of vaginal discharge are obtained for examination under a

microscope. If you have recurring infections, some of the discharge may be cultured to see if yeast or another type of organism is present.

TREATMENT

Once a yeast infection is confirmed, you will be prescribed an antifungal pill such as Diflucan, or an over-the-counter cream or suppository such as GyneLotrimin or Monistat. These medications vary from a single-dose treatment to a weeklong series of treatments.

If you think you have a yeast infection because of past experiences with yeast infections and there has been no change in your sexual history (no new partner, no unprotected genital contact), you may want to try one of the over-the-counter yeast treatments first. If your symptoms do not go away, you should then see your medical provider for an exam. Recent studies found that many women misdiagnose their own yeast infections and use one of the over-the-counter treatments when no yeast infection is present. Over time, a woman's body may become drug-resistant to yeast infection medication, with the real problem not treated.

Sexual partners who have no symptoms of a yeast infection usually do not need treatment. A partner (male or female) with symptoms should see a provider for evaluation and concurrent treatment. While the treatment is underway, a latex barrier during sex may prevent passing the infection to a partner; however, if you are using yeast creams or suppositories, the ingredients may damage the latex of condoms, diaphragms, and dental dams. Using a latex barrier is not recommended with these treatments because the latex may break. To minimize the risk of passing the infection to a partner and to speed healing, it is generally recommended that you abstain from sexual activity until all of your symptoms have resolved.

PREVENTION

- Eat a balanced diet.
- Get enough sleep.
- If you go swimming, get out of your swimsuit as soon as possible.
- Do not wear pads or panty-liners beyond the length of your period.
- Do not use deodorant tampons and avoid feminine deodorant sprays and douches. They irritate the vulva and vaginal areas.
- Wipe from front to back after urination and bowel movement.
- If you need to take antibiotics, ask for an anti-yeast prescription or buy over-the-counter creams or suppositories. Antibiotics can also cause a yeast infection, since they kill or decrease normal flora.
- Avoid tight-fitting clothing and wear cotton, rather than synthetic, underwear.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

To schedule an appointment at UHS, call 275-2662. All visits to UHS are confidential.

LINKS

Yeast Infection Resource
<http://www.yeastinfectionresource.com/>

Vaginitis (ASHA)
<http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaq/vaginitis.html>