

Vaginal Infection

A vaginal infection, also called vaginitis, is the irritation of the vagina that causes changes in vaginal discharge, itching, odor and other signs.

Most women have some vaginal discharge. This discharge keeps the vagina clean and moist. Normal discharge has a mild odor and should be clear, white or yellow. It may leave a yellowish color on your underwear when it dries. You may have a few days of heavy, clear, slippery discharge about halfway between your monthly periods. This occurs when an ovary releases an egg.

Signs

You may have one or more of these signs with a vaginal infection:

- Change in the amount, color or odor of vaginal discharge
- Itching or burning around the vagina
- Burning when urinating
- An urge to urinate more often
- Sores or warts near the vaginal opening
- Painful sex
- Chills or fever
- Stomach or abdominal pain or cramping

Call your doctor if you have any signs of infection. Your doctor will do an exam to find out the type of infection you have.

Types of Vaginal Infection

Yeast Infection

Yeast infections are caused by fungus. Symptoms of a yeast infection include a thick, white discharge that looks like cottage cheese but does not have a foul odor. Yeast infections can cause vaginal itching, burning, redness, and pain with urination or sex.

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

Bacterial Vaginosis is caused by an overgrowth of certain kinds of bacteria in the vagina. BV occurs when your vagina has more harmful bacteria than good bacteria. Vaginal discharge may be watery, gray in color, heavy and foul smelling. There may be pain during urination and itching around the vagina.

Atrophic Vaginitis

Atrophic vaginitis is the thinning, inflammation and shrinking of the vagina caused by low estrogen levels. Low estrogen levels can occur after menopause, childbirth, or while breastfeeding. It may cause discharge, itching and burning. Urinating and sex may become hard to do and painful.

Trichomoniasis Vaginitis

“Trich” is an infection spread by sexual contact and caused by a parasite. Heavy discharge with odor, itching, and painful sex and urination may occur. Some women have no signs. You may become infected again if your partner is not also treated.

Your Care

See your doctor if you have any signs of infection. Your treatment may include:

- Medicines
 - › Finish all of your medicine as ordered. The infection may still be present even if the discharge goes away before the medicine is finished.
- Bathing
 - › Bathe or shower each day and clean the area around the vagina well.
 - › Keep the area as dry as you can. Wear cotton underwear.
- Sanitary pads
 - › Use pads if there is a lot of discharge.
 - › **Do not** use tampons to absorb discharge.

Both you and your partner may need treatment as **some types of vaginal infection can be spread by sexual contact**. Ask your doctor if your partner needs treatment. If you are told to return for a follow up check, be sure to schedule an appointment

Preventing Vaginal Infections

If you have a vaginal infection that keeps coming back, try these tips to help prevent it:

- Avoid spreading germs from the rectum to the vagina. When you go to the bathroom, always wipe from the front of your body to the back, away from the vagina.
- Wash your vagina daily with a mild soap and keep the area as dry as possible. Change your underwear every day and remove wet bathing suits and exercise clothes as soon as possible. vagina well and keep the area as dry as possible.
- Avoid irritating soaps or detergents, feminine hygiene sprays, perfumed toilet paper or perfumed tampons. These products may make symptoms worse.
- Clean diaphragms and spermicidal applicators with hot soapy water and rinse well.
- Do not douche.
 - › Using a douche can wash away good bacteria and cause you to have more vaginal infections.
 - › Your vaginal discharge will smell different during your monthly cycle. This is normal. If you have an odor that does not go away after washing, check with your doctor or nurse.
 - › Douching after having sex does not prevent pregnancy.
 - › Women who douche may have more of a chance of getting pelvic inflammatory disease.

- Avoid tight jeans, underwear or pantyhose without a cotton crotch, and other clothing that can trap heat and moisture.
- Do not use home cures. Home cures only hide the problem.
- Use condoms to protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.