

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 underpants 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 sexual intercourse
- 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. Vaginal discharge is thick, white and looks like cottage cheese. There is a strong, but not foul odor. Yeast infections can cause vaginal itching.

- **Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)**

Bacteria that live in stool cause this type of vaginal infection. Vaginal discharge is watery, gray in color, heavy and foul smelling. There may be pain during urination and itching around the vagina.

- **Atrophic Vaginitis**

The thinning and shrinking of the vagina causes this infection. It can occur when estrogen levels are low after menopause, childbirth or while breastfeeding. It may cause discharge, itching and burning. Urination and sexual intercourse may become difficult and painful.

- **Trichomoniasis Vaginitis**

“Trich” is a sexually transmitted infection caused by a parasite. Heavy discharge with odor, itching, and painful sexual intercourse 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 sanitary 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 for that.

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. After a bowel movement, wipe from front to back, away from the vagina.
- Clean the lips of the vagina well and keep the area as dry as possible.
- Avoid irritating soaps or detergents, feminine hygiene sprays, perfumed toilet paper or perfumed tampons.
- 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 sexual intercourse does not prevent pregnancy.
 - ▶ Women who douche may have more of a chance of getting pelvic inflammatory disease.
- Avoid tight jeans, panties or panty hose without a cotton crotch, and other clothing that can trap moisture.
- Do not use home remedies. Home remedies only hide the problem.
- Use condoms to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

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

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