



## Frequently Asked Questions about Vaginal Yeast Infections

### What is a vaginal yeast infection?

Yeast infections are a common cause of irritation of the vagina and *vulva* (area around the opening to the vagina). About 75 percent of women have a vaginal yeast infection during their lives.

A kind of fungus called *Candida* causes vaginal yeast infections. It is normal to have some yeast in your vagina. Usually yeast is in balance with other organisms. But sometimes the balance is lost, and yeast overgrowth occurs. Hormonal changes can affect the acidity of the vagina and lead to yeast overgrowth. Another common cause of yeast infections is taking antibiotics.

### What are the symptoms of vaginal yeast infections?

Symptoms of vaginal yeast infections in women may be mild or very uncomfortable. Symptoms may include:

- Itching, burning, and irritation of the vagina
- Itching, redness and irritation of the vulva
- Painful urination and/or intercourse
- Abnormal vaginal discharge, usually described as looking like cottage cheese. But discharge may vary in amount and appearance. It does not have a bad odor.

Symptoms of yeast infections can be similar to symptoms of other kinds of vaginal infections.

### What causes vaginal yeast infections?

Conditions that may make yeast infections more likely include:

- Pregnancy and other causes of hormone changes.
- Use of oral contraceptives (birth control pills).
- Diabetes that isn't well controlled. High blood sugar can help yeast to multiply.
- A weakened immune system.
- Use of steroid drugs.

- Use of antibiotics. Antibiotic drugs kill bacteria in the body including the vagina, allowing yeast to multiply and cause an infection.

Yeast infections seem to be only rarely passed from one person to another through sexual contact. A male partner of a woman with a yeast infection usually will have no symptoms, but some men may get an itchy rash on the penis.

## **How is a yeast infection diagnosed?**

Your health care provider will examine you and use a swab to take a sample from the affected area. A lab test of the sample will show if yeast is the cause of your symptoms.

## **How is a yeast infection treated?**

Yeast infections are treated with antifungal drugs, such as *clotrimazole* or *miconazole*. There are creams and tablets used in the vagina, skin ointments, and pills.

Antifungal drugs usually work well to treat a vaginal yeast infection. But infections that do respond to treatment are becoming more common. Taking antifungal drugs when they are not needed can help make yeast resistant to the drugs. For this reason, you should not use antifungal drugs unless you are sure that you have a yeast infection.

If you are sure that you have a yeast infection, you can buy over-the-counter products to treat the infection. Be sure to follow the directions for using the product. If you are not sure whether you have a yeast infection or another type of infection or problem, you should see your health care provider. You should also see your health care provider if you have recurring yeast infections.

## **How can I prevent yeast infections?**

Don't use douches, perfumed vaginal sprays, or other scented products that irritate the vagina. Wear cotton underpants and pantyhose with a cotton crotch to help keep the genital area ventilated. If you have a problem with recurring yeast infections, ask your health care provider about ways to prevent them.

**For more information...**

For more information on yeast infections, call the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 800-994-WOMAN or contact the following organizations.

**National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases**

Phone Number (s): (800) 448-0440

Internet Address: <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

Phone Number (s): (800) 311-3435 (Public Inquiries) or (888) 232-3228 (Information Request System)

Internet Address: <http://www.cdc.gov/>

**American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**

Phone Number (s): (202) 863-2518 or (800) 762-2264 x 192 (for publications requests only)

Internet Address: <http://www.acog.org>

**Planned Parenthood Federation of America**

Phone Number (s): (800) 230-7526

Internet Address: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

This information was adapted from fact sheets from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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