

## PATIENT RESOURCES

### Yeast Infection

#### What is a yeast infection?

Vaginal yeast infections (also called yeast vaginitis or vaginal candidiasis) are a common problem in women. The most common symptoms are itching and irritation of the vulva and around the opening of the vagina. Vaginal yeast infections usually go away after treatment. Sometimes they may come back quickly or can be hard to treat. Yeast infections occur mainly in women during their menstrual years (having monthly periods). They are rare in postmenopausal women (women who have stopped having menstrual periods due to normal aging), and in girls who have not yet started menstruating.

#### What are the symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection?

The most common symptoms of a yeast infection include the following:

- Itching or irritation of the vulva (the skin outside the vagina), and around the vaginal opening
- Pain with urination, vulvar soreness or irritation
- Pain with intercourse
- Reddened and swollen vulvar and vaginal tissues
- Some women have no abnormal vaginal discharge. Others have white clumpy or watery vaginal discharge.
- Symptoms of a yeast infection are similar to a number of other conditions, including bacterial vaginosis (a bacterial infection of the vagina), trichomoniasis (a sexually transmitted infection), and dermatitis (irritated skin). It is often not possible to know if itching is caused by yeast or other causes without seeing your provider.

#### What causes a vaginal yeast infection?

Yeast is a type of fungus. The fungus that causes yeast infections (named *Candida*) normally lives in the gastrointestinal tract (intestines) and sometimes the vagina. Normally, *Candida* causes no symptoms. However, when there are changes in the normal flora (balance of bacteria and yeast) of the gastrointestinal tract and/or vagina (caused by medicines, injury, or stress to the immune system), *Candida* can overgrow and cause the symptoms described above.

#### Why did I get a vaginal yeast infection?

In most women, there is no underlying health problem that leads to a yeast infection. There are several risk factors that may increase the chances of developing an infection, including the following:

- Antibiotics—Most antibiotics kill a wide variety of bacteria, including those that normally live in the vagina. These “good” bacteria protect the vagina from the overgrowth of yeast. Some women are prone to yeast infections while taking antibiotics.
- Diabetes, with elevated urinary glucose and blood glucose; the higher sugar levels can provide energy for yeast to multiply.

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- Hormonal contraceptives (birth control pills, patch, and vaginal ring)—The risk of yeast infections may be higher in women who use hormonal birth control methods.
- Immunosuppression (weakened immune system)—Yeast infections are more common in people who have a weakened immune system due to HIV or use of certain medications (steroids, chemotherapy, post-organ transplant medications).
- Pregnancy—Vaginal discharge becomes more noticeable during pregnancy, although yeast infection is not always the cause.
- Sexual activity—Vaginal yeast infections are not a sexually transmitted infection. They can occur in women who have never been sexually active, but are more common in women who are sexually active.

### Diagnosis

Yeast infections can be diagnosed with an exam. During the exam, your provider will examine your vulva and vagina and swab the vagina to get a sample of discharge for evaluation. Do not begin treatment at home before being examined.

### Self-diagnosis

Women with vulvar itching or vaginal discharge often think that their symptoms are caused by a yeast infection and then use an over-the-counter treatment from the pharmacy. But only one out of ten women who think they have a yeast infection actually have one!

### Potential drawbacks of diagnosing and treating yourself:

- May waste money (on non-prescription treatment)
- May waste time; you will not feel better until you use the right treatment
- May make you more itchy and irritated
- May make it harder for your provider to figure out what's wrong

### Treatment for vaginal yeast infection

Treatment of a vaginal yeast infection may include a pill that you take by mouth or a vaginal cream or vaginal suppository.

### When will I feel better?

Most yeast infections go away within a few days after starting treatment. However, you may continue to feel itchy and irritated, even after the infection is gone. If you do not get better within a few days after finishing treatment, call your provider for advice.

### What if the yeast infection comes back?

About one out of every 15 women who get yeast infections will get them frequently (every couple of months). If you think your yeast infection is coming back, you should see your healthcare provider. It's

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important to make sure that your symptoms are caused by yeast, not something else (eg, other vaginal infections, allergic reaction or sensitivity, eczema). It's important to see your provider instead of treating yourself because you may not have yeast.

Most vaginal yeast infections are caused by a type of yeast called *Candida albicans*. Persistent or recurrent infections may be due to infection with a different species of *Candida*, such as *Candida glabrata* or *Candida krusei*. If you have frequent yeast infections, your provider may test for other types of yeast.

### Treatment of recurrent yeast infections

If you have frequent yeast infections, you may need a longer course of treatment. This may be a vaginal cream (clotrimazole) used for 7-14 days or a pill (fluconazole) with a second and third dose 3 and 6 days later.

If your yeast infections keep coming back even after a longer course of medicine, your provider may recommend medicine to prevent infections. This may include fluconazole (a pill taken once per week) or clotrimazole (vaginal suppositories or cream used once per week).

### Does my sexual partner need to be treated?

Vaginal yeast infections are not a sexually transmitted infection, although the infection may rarely be passed from one partner to another. Experts do not recommend treatment of a sexual partner.

### How do I prevent a yeast infection?

Most yeast infections happen without a specific reason. If you have a yeast infection and it goes away with treatment, you don't need to worry. If you have frequent yeast infections, your doctor may recommend medicine for prevention. Yogurt contains "good bacteria" (called lactobacillus), and you may have heard that eating yogurt can be helpful. Yogurt is a healthy source of protein and calcium, but unfortunately there is no evidence that eating yogurt or other products containing live *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, or applying these products to the vagina helps prevent yeast infections.

### Healthy vulvovaginal hygiene

Healthier practices include the following:

- Use water or unscented non-soap cleanser to wash genitalia, use warm (not hot) water and the hand (not a washcloth)
- Do not douche (rinse or wash the vagina) or use feminine hygiene products; if odor or discharge is bothersome, see a healthcare provider
- Avoid hot baths with scented products; plain warm water is preferred
- Wear cotton underwear
- Rinse genitals with water and/or pat dry after toileting; avoid use of baby wipes or scented toilet paper