

Patient information from BMJ

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Yeast infection

If you have a yeast infection, you get a discharge from your vagina. You may also feel itchy and sore. Yeast infections are usually easy to get rid of, but some women find they keep coming back.

This information is about a yeast infection that affects your vagina. It's also possible to get a similar infection that affects other parts of your body, such as your mouth.

What are yeast infections?

A yeast infection (also called **candidiasis**) is usually caused by a type of yeast called *Candida albicans*. Candida lives naturally in your body. But if too much of this yeast grows in your vagina, it causes an infection.

A yeast infection isn't usually serious. But if it doesn't go away with treatment, or keeps coming back, there's a chance it could be a sign of another health problem. See your doctor if this happens.

Doctors don't normally think of yeast infections as sexually transmitted infections. A few men get a rash on their penis after sex with a woman who has a yeast infection. This can be treated by an antifungal cream. If both partners have a yeast infection, they can re-infect each other, so they should both get treatment at the same time.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom of a yeast infection is a discharge from your vagina. This is usually thick and white, but some women get a watery discharge. The area outside your vagina may also feel sore and itchy.

A lot of women treat yeast infections themselves. If you have symptoms for the first time, or aren't sure what's causing your symptoms, see your doctor.

Women often get yeast infections after being treated with antibiotics.

What treatments work?

What can you do to help yourself?

The yeast that causes infections grows best in warm, moist conditions. Wearing loose, cotton underclothes and stockings rather than pantyhose may help prevent yeast infections.

If you have diabetes, you may be more likely to get a yeast infection. If you get yeast infections more often, ask your doctor to test you for diabetes.

Some people think the type of birth control you use affects your chance of getting yeast infections. You might want to ask your doctor about trying a different type of birth control if a yeast infection keeps returning.

Drug treatments

Some drugs for yeast infections come as a cream or a vaginal tablet (suppository). Others come as pills you swallow. Pills you take by mouth work just as well as treatments you put in your vagina.

You can buy some of these drugs from a drugstore, but others need to be prescribed by your doctor.

You put the suppositories in at night. It's fine to use them during your period. You can get combination packs containing suppositories to treat the infection and a cream to help with irritation. You may only need one dose.

Most women don't get side effects, but you could get irritation in your vagina. There's also a chance that creams or suppositories could damage condoms or diaphragms. It's OK to use most of these treatments if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, but check with your doctor which are best.

Antifungal pills (fluconazole) can clear up a yeast infection with one dose. You can ask your doctor for a prescription. Some women who take them get side effects, such as a headache, abdominal pain, or nausea. You shouldn't take fluconazole if you're pregnant.

If you keep getting yeast infections, your doctor might suggest you keep using your medication regularly.

Other treatments

Some women try natural remedies for yeast infections including tea tree oil, garlic, and yogurt. We don't know if these help. Putting these substances inside your vagina could cause irritation.

What will happen to me?

A yeast infection usually clears up with treatment. Even without treatment, it will probably go away on its own.

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Yeast infections don't cause any long-term damage. If you're pregnant and have a yeast infection, it won't hurt your baby.

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