

VAGINAL DISCHARGE

Vaginitis is a term used to describe an irritation or infection of the vagina. Vaginitis is very common and affects many women at some point in their lives. Although healthy women may normally have vaginal discharge, an unusual discharge with a change in color, consistency or amount, lower abdominal pain; back pain, vaginal bleeding; vaginal or vulvar itching, redness, rash or irritation; or pain or difficulty with urination, should be evaluated by a clinician.

There are many types of vaginitis caused by various organisms. These vaginal infections often have similar symptoms, so it's important to be checked by a clinician and receive the appropriate treatment.

The most common types of vaginitis include a fungal infection called Monilia (mo-ni-lie-a), a non-specific vaginitis called Bacterial Vaginosis (vag-en-no-sis), and a parasitic infection called Trichomoniasis (Trick-o-mo-ni-a-sis).

The first type of vaginitis, Monilia, is also called Candidiasis or, most commonly, a yeast infection. This fungus is normally present in the mouth, large intestine and vagina; however, at times, the normal amount of yeast will grow out of control for various reasons. Certain conditions, such as changes in the hormonal balance, may make a woman more susceptible to a yeast infection. Some examples of these include pregnancy, birth control pills, or menopause. A woman may also develop an infection by having a low resistance to infection caused by stress, poor nutrition, fatigue, emotional upset, and nervousness. Certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, increase the risk of developing yeast infections. Chemical irritants such as douches and feminine deodorants as well as prescribed antibiotics may cause a woman to be more susceptible to a yeast infection. Some women react to sugary foods by developing yeast infections.

The common symptoms of a yeast infection include a thick, white discharge, itching, and irritation.

To diagnose a yeast infection, a health practitioner will take a sample of the discharge to determine the specific organism causing the infection. Once diagnosed, the practitioner will prescribe a vaginal cream or suppository that is inserted into the vagina with an applicator resembling a tampon. A single dose oral medication may also be prescribed. Some brands of the medication have become available over-the-counter and may not require a prescription. This preparation stops the infection by killing the yeast-like cells (and preventing any further growth). It is essential that all medication be used even if it is during the menstrual period.

The second type of vaginitis is Bacterial Vaginosis. For more information on this infection, [click here](#).

A protozoan known as a Trichomonad (Trick-o-moan-ad) causes the third type of vaginal infection, Trichomonas vaginalis or (Trich). Trich is often sexually transmissible through intercourse although this is not always the case. Trichomonads may live for several hours on moist objects at room temperature; therefore, transmission can take place by using a wash cloth or a wet towel of a person carrying the Trich organism.

A symptom associated with Trich is an unusual discharge with an unpleasant odor. After diagnosing Trich by examining a sample of discharge from the genitals, the health practitioner will usually prescribe an oral medication called Flagyl (Fla-jil). **People who take Flagyl must avoid drinking alcohol until 48 hours after completing the medication.** Since many men and women often have no symptoms, it is important to have all sexual partners treated to prevent infection or further spread of the infection. Having male partners wear a condom during sexual intercourse may also help prevent further infection and transmission.

Although all vaginal infections are not sexually transmissible, it is important to be aware of all sexually transmissible infections called STIs. If a woman notices an unusual discharge, it is important to consider her sexual activity to rule out the possibility of an STI. Being tested for STIs, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea, at an annual gynecological exam is a good way to detect any such infections.

To make a medical appointment concerning vaginitis, Penn State students at University Park should call the Women's Health Department at (814) 863-2633 or stop in Room 122 Ritenour Building. For accurate diagnosis, do not douche or use vaginal medications for 48 hours before your appointment.

Students at campuses other than University Park may contact their campus health nurse for further information.

Test Results and Advice Nurse

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

Appointments

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at www.sa.psu.edu/uhs
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