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YEAST INFECTIONS IN WOMEN

Many women will develop a yeast infection of the vagina at some point in their lives. The condition is not serious and will not damage the reproductive system, but it can be very uncomfortable and annoying. In order to alleviate the discomfort and to rule out more serious problems, it is important to see a women's health practitioner.

Understanding Yeast Infections

Symptoms

- A thick, white discharge (may be cottage cheese-like)
- Itching, redness and swelling around the opening to the vagina
- A burning sensation externally during or after urination
- Vaginal burning or discomfort during intercourse

However, some women with yeast infections have no symptoms.

Causes

Healthy bacteria in the vaginal tract usually control yeast growth. For reasons not completely understood, yeast that is normally found in the vagina may grow rapidly if the delicate balance of vaginal organisms is disturbed. Such overgrowth of yeast is most commonly called a yeast infection, but can also be described as monilia, candidiasis, or monilial vulvovaginitis.

Frequently, the exact cause of what triggered vaginal yeast overgrowth is unclear and difficult or impossible to identify. However, the following factors can contribute to yeast infections.

- Antibiotics can kill healthy bacteria that keep yeast under control as well as disease-causing bacteria.
- Oral contraceptives may alter the normal bacterial balance in the vagina and contribute to an overgrowth of yeast. Today's low-dosage birth control pills are less apt to do this than the higher dosage formulations of the past.
- Women who have diabetes have higher "blood sugar" in vaginal tissue, which allows yeast to thrive.
- Hormonal influences during pregnancy can stimulate yeast growth.
- Frequent douching will wash away bacteria that usually protect the vagina from yeast overgrowth.

Severe and frequent yeast infections should be discussed further with your health care provider.

Diagnosis

Your clinician will examine you and sample your vaginal secretions with a cotton swab (Q-tip) and analyze it for yeast structures. Do not douche or use an intra-vaginal over-the-counter medication for 24 to 48 hours before the appointment and do not schedule an appointment during your period.

Treatment

Vaginal creams or suppositories containing anti-fungal agents are most commonly prescribed for one, three or seven days, depending on the formula, dosage, and application frequency. A one-dose oral anti-fungal medication is sometimes prescribed. To relieve itching, the cream should be applied on the external genital tissue two times daily. Use all the medication prescribed, and notify your clinician if symptoms persist.

Avoid vaginal intercourse and using tampons during treatment.

Frequent yeast infections may require preventive treatment each month for several months. If the underlying cause of the overgrowth remains unchanged, yeast infections can easily recur.

Self-treatment

Anti-fungal medications for yeast infections are now available without a prescription. These preparations are known by various brand names such as Monistat7® and GyneLotrimin®. If you have had yeast infections before and feel sure that you have a yeast infection again, you can try one course of treatment with an over-the-counter preparation.

You should be examined by a health care provider if:

- This is the first time you have had symptoms suggesting a yeast infection
- Your sex partner is having symptoms
- You have had intercourse with a new partner
- You are worried about sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- You are having abdominal pain
- Your symptoms do not resolve following your treatment
- Your symptoms return shortly after your treatment has been completed

Prevention

- Keep cool—avoid nylon underpants, pantyhose, or tight-fitting pants.
- Remove your wet bathing suit or damp exercise clothing immediately after swimming or exercise.
- Avoid feminine hygiene sprays, scented toilet paper, deodorant tampons, bubble baths, and anti-static dryer sheets.
- Do not douche.
- Wipe from front to back following a bowel movement to avoid spreading yeast from the rectum to the external vulva and vagina.
- Get adequate rest, eat a well-balanced diet including less sugar, and reduce stress to help minimize recurrences.
- If you need vaginal lubrication during intercourse, use a water-soluble lubricant or contraceptive creams or jellies. Do not use oil-based products such as Vaseline.

Please Read

If you develop any new, prolonged, or more severe symptoms of your illness, call the nurse at 863-2633 or consult your personal clinician. If University Health Services is closed, go to Mount Nittany Medical Center Emergency Department or call 911 for an ambulance.

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

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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