



Vaginitis: Causes and Treatments

Vaginitis is an inflammation of a woman's vagina. As many as one-third of women will have symptoms of vaginitis sometime during their lives. Vaginitis affects women of all ages. There are many possible causes, and the type of treatment depends on the cause.

The Vagina

The vagina has a normal discharge — fluid that passes out of the vagina — that is clear or cloudy and whitish. A healthy vagina keeps a balance of many organisms, such as bacteria and yeast.

Many factors can affect the normal balance of the vagina:

- Antibiotics
- Changes in the body's normal hormone levels, such as those that occur with pregnancy, breast-feeding or menopause
- Douches
- Spermicides
- Sexual intercourse
- Sexually transmissible diseases (STDs)

Diagnosis and Treatment

To diagnose vaginitis, your doctor will take a sample of the discharge from your vagina and look at it under a microscope.

Treatment may depend on the cause of the vaginitis, as well as on your special needs.

Types of Vaginitis

Yeast Infection

Yeast infection is also known as candidiasis. It is one of the most common types of vaginal infection.

Cause. Yeast infection is caused by a fungus called Candida.

Symptoms. The most common symptoms of a yeast infection are itching and burning of the vagina and vulva.

Treatment. Yeast infections are usually treated by placing medication into the vagina.

You can buy over-the-counter yeast medication, but be sure to see your doctor if:

- This is the first time you've had a vaginal infection
- Your symptoms do not go away after treatment
- Your vaginal discharge is yellow or green or has a bad odor
- There is a chance that you have an STD

Bacterial Vaginosis

Causes. The bacteria that cause bacterial vaginosis occur naturally in the vagina. Bacterial vaginosis is caused by overgrowth of several of these bacteria.



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Symptoms. The main symptom is increased discharge with a strong fishy odor. The odor is stronger during your menstrual period or after sex. The discharge is thin and dark or dull gray. Itching is not common, but may be present if there is a lot of discharge. Some women may have no symptoms.

Treatment. Two antibiotics are used to treat bacterial vaginosis. One is a drug called metronidazole. The other drug is called clindamycin.

Trichomonas Vaginitis

Causes. Trichomonas is a parasite that is spread through sex. Women who have trichomonas vaginitis are at higher risk for infection with other STDs.

Symptoms. Signs of trichomoniasis may include a yellow-gray or green vaginal discharge. The discharge may have a fishy odor. There may be burning, irritation, redness, and swelling of the vulva and vagina.

Treatment. Trichomoniasis is usually treated with a single dose of metronidazole by mouth.

Atrophic Vaginitis

This type of vaginitis is linked with not having enough estrogen.

Finally ...

At the first sign of any abnormal discharge or symptoms of vaginitis, contact your doctor so that the problem can be properly diagnosed and treated. Although vaginitis can be annoying and uncomfortable, it can almost always be successfully treated once the cause has been found.

(Adapted from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists handout)