

Vaginal Discharge and Vaginitis

What is vaginal discharge?

- Vaginal discharge is the fluid that is made by the vagina and cervix and flows out daily.
- Normal vaginal discharge is generally clear and whitish.
- The amount of discharge depends on where you are in your menstrual cycle, state of sexual excitement, and general health.
- Any changes in a woman’s normal discharge may mean that she has an infection.

What is vaginitis?

- Vaginitis is a soreness or infection in or around the vagina.

How do I get vaginitis?

- Vaginitis is usually caused by yeast, trichomoniasis, or bacterial vaginosis.
- It is not always spread through sexual contact.
- **Yeast (*Candida albicans*)** is a fungus normally in the vagina. It can become overgrown when you use antibiotics, birth control pills, vaginal contraceptives, or perfumed products such as bubble baths, soaps, douches, and powder.
- **Bacterial Vaginosis** is caused by the overgrowth of the bacteria that normally lives in and around the vagina.
- **Trichomoniasis** is a parasitic organism that is transmitted through unprotected sexual activity. It can also live on wet towels and objects, which may spread the infection if they come in contact with your genitals. The parasites may infect the vagina, urethra, bladder, or cervix. If not treated, trichomoniasis can increase the risk of transmitting HIV.

What are the symptoms?

| In Women: | In Men: |
|--|---|
| <p>Yeast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clumpy white discharge from the vagina • itching, swelling, or redness around the vagina • painful sex <p>Bacterial Vaginosis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “fishy” smelling, thin watery, grayish, or yellowish discharge • burning, itching, swelling, redness around the vagina <p>Trichomoniasis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foamy yellow or green discharge • bad or musty smelling discharge • burning or itching around the vagina • pain during sexual intercourse or urination (peeing) | <p>Yeast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • genital itching • a mild rash on the penis <p>Bacterial Vaginosis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rarely have symptoms that need treatment <p>Trichomoniasis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually no symptoms • may have burning during urination (peeing) • mild discharge • irritation/redness on tip of penis |

How do I get tested?

- A vaginal swab can be taken by a doctor, the STD, or Family Planning Clinics.

How is vaginitis treated?

- **Yeast** is treated with vaginal creams or tablets available in most stores with a pharmacy. If the infection comes back, see a doctor. Males usually use the same cream.
- **Bacterial Vaginosis** is treated with antibiotics. Men usually do not need treatment.
- **Trichomoniasis** is treated with antibiotics. Your partner must also be treated.
 - If left untreated, trichomoniasis can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)

How can I prevent vaginitis?

| Do | Do Not |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• wash or bath daily• wear clean, cotton underwear• wipe from front to back after using the toilet• get lots of rest• urinate (pee) after sex• use a condom every time you have sex | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use bath oil, vaginal douches, bubble bath, feminine deodorant sprays, strong soaps, or scented tampons• wear tight jeans, pants, or underwear• wear nylon underwear or pantyhose• have sex with a partner who has a discharge, a rash, or sores around the genitals |

How can I prevent the spread of sexually transmitted vaginitis?

- Abstinence (not having sex) may be your best choice.
- If you are being treated, do not have sex until the medication is finished and the symptoms are gone.
- Practice “**safer sex**”. Always use condoms during vaginal, anal, and oral sex.
- Use a dental dam during oral sex on women.
- Do not share sex toys.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have.
- Ask your partner about his or her sexual history.
- Get tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) before having any sexual activity with a new partner
- If you think you have been infected with an STI, see a healthcare provider.
- Do not have sex with an infected person. You cannot tell just by looking at the person.
- Tell your partner if you have an infection.
- Get information, guidance, and support.

For More Information Call:

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Education/Health Promotion 403-955-6515

Clinical Services:

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre 5th floor, 1213-4th St. SW 403-955-6500
South Calgary Health Centre 31 Sunpark Plaza SE 403-943-9510
Sunridge Professional Building 406, 2675-36 St NE 403-944-7666

STD Clinic

Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre 5th floor, 1213-4th St. SW 403-955-6700

For 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

Visit www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/sexualhealth for more information about sexual health.

This material is designed for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have specific questions, please consult your doctor or appropriate healthcare professional.