

Vaginal yeast infection

What is a vaginal yeast infection?

A vaginal yeast infection is a common infection. It is caused by an overgrowth of yeast in the vagina, which can lead to irritating but treatable symptoms.

What causes vaginal yeast infections?

Vaginal yeast infections can be caused by many factors, some of which include:

- Current or recent use of antibiotics
- Use of corticosteroid medications
- Problems with your immune system including unmanaged HIV infection
- Increased estrogen levels, like during pregnancy
- High blood sugar from poorly controlled diabetes
- Moisture such as damp clothes from swimming, exercising or wearing pads or panty liners for a long time without changing

How is it spread?

Vaginal yeast infections are not usually spread during sex. However, if your partner has symptoms, they should also see their health care provider for assessment and treatment. Penile yeast infections are not as common as vaginal yeast infections but can occur.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection can include:

- Itching in or around the genital/vagina
- Change in amount and colour (often white, thick, clumpy and odourless) of fluid from the vagina

- Red, irritated and/or swollen skin around the opening of the vagina
- Pain during vaginal sex
- Pain or a burning feeling when urinating

Penile yeast infections often cause a rash under the foreskin or on the penis. The foreskin or penis may also be itchy or irritated.

Other vaginal infections, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and some scented soaps, feminine hygiene products or deodorant sprays can cause symptoms similar to a vaginal yeast infection. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, see your health care provider:

- You are pregnant
- You are unsure if your symptoms are those of a yeast infection
- This is your first yeast infection
- You have repeated symptoms of yeast infections

What is the treatment?

Treatment for vaginal yeast infections may include taking pills orally, using creams or ointments on genital skin or inserting tablets or creams into the vagina. Some treatments require a prescription from your health care provider while others can be bought over-the-counter (OTC) at a pharmacy.

With treatment, most yeast infections get better in 2-3 days.

How can I prevent getting a vaginal yeast infection?

Some ways to prevent getting a yeast infection include:

- Avoid unnecessary use of antibiotics

- Change menstrual pads every 4 hours and tampons every 4-6 hours. Avoid tampon use while treating a yeast infection
- Avoid douching or using perfumed soaps, sprays or tampons
- Use unscented soap or no soap at all on your genitals. Immediately change out of wet clothes, like swimsuits or workout clothes
- Eat a balanced diet low in sugar content, refined carbohydrates (that is white breads and pastas) and alcohol
- Wear cotton underwear and loose-fitting clothing. Avoid nylon or other synthetic fabrics that hold body heat and moisture close to the skin

How can I reduce my chance of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Practice safer sex by using a condom

When used correctly, male and female condoms help prevent the spread of many STIs during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Condoms are less effective at preventing STIs spread by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes simplex virus, genital warts (human papillomavirus (HPV)) and syphilis (when sores are present).

Important things to remember when using condoms:

- Check the condom package for damage. Do not use damaged condoms
- Check the expiry date. Do not use outdated condom
- Carefully open the package so that the condom does not tear. Do not use torn condoms
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects such as rings, studs or piercings
- Store condoms at room temperature
- Use a new condom every time you have sex. Do not reuse condoms
- Do not use 2 condoms at once

- Certain vaginal medications, such as yeast infection treatments, can reduce the effectiveness of latex condoms. Treatments containing estrogen are particularly likely to damage latex condoms
- Use only water-based lubricants with male latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil can weaken and destroy latex
- Water or oil-based lubricant may be used with polyurethane condoms
- Use only condoms made of latex or polyurethane plastic)
- Latex or polyurethane condoms work the best to help prevent pregnancy and STIs (Animal skin condoms do not work as well as latex or polyurethane condoms to prevent STIs)

Practice safer sex by using dental dams or other barriers

A dental dam is a piece of thin latex that is placed over the vagina/internal genitals or anus during oral sex. It can also be called a latex barrier/sheet, latex dam, oral dam or sheet. Dental dams are a good way to lower the chance of getting or passing sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Important things to remember when using dental dams:

- Before you use the dam, hold it up to light and check for holes
- Rinse it gently with warm water to remove any powder
- Hold the dam over the vagina/internal genitals or anus
- Be sure that only one side of the dam touches the vagina/internal genitals or anus
- Use a new dam each time you have oral sex
- Use a different dam for the anal area and the vagina/internal genital area
- Use lubricant on the vagina/internal genitals or anus to improve sensation

- Dispose of the dam in the garbage

Medications

There are medications that can lower your chances of getting or passing on certain STIs. For more information, visit [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).

Get vaccinated

Some STIs, such as hepatitis A, hepatitis B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

Know your sexual health status

If you have recently changed sexual partners or have more than one sex partner, get tested for STIs often. Testing for STIs will confirm if you have an infection. Some people can have an STI and not have any symptoms. Finding and treating an STI reduces the chances of passing infections on to your partner(s).

Having more partners increases your risk of being exposed to STIs.

Talk about prevention

Talk to your partner(s) about STIs and how you would like to prevent them before having sex. If you are having trouble discussing safer sex with your partner(s), talk about it with your health care provider or a counsellor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner(s), visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com/sexual-health/partners-communication/talking-to-your-partners>.

Informing partners

If you have a sexually transmitted infection and are sexually active, it is important to tell your sexual partner(s). This will enable them to make informed decisions about their health and getting tested.

For more information

For more information on how you can reduce your chance of getting an STI, visit [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority