

A vaginal yeast infection is an infection of the vagina and vaginal area. It is caused by a type of fungus called yeast. When this yeast increases it can cause an infection.

# Vaginal Yeast Infections

Three out of four women will get a vaginal yeast infection during their life. Some women will have it more than once. A vaginal yeast infection is NOT a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

## How is it spread?

Yeast is not spread from person to person. Small amounts of yeast can be found in the normal vagina. Infection occurs when too much yeast begins to grow. Vaginal yeast infections can increase with:

- ◆ Pregnancy.
- ◆ Illness such as HIV disease or diabetes.

- ◆ Some medicines such as:
  - Antibiotics.
  - Birth control pills.
  - Cortisone-type drugs.
  - Some chemotherapy drugs.
- ◆ Stress.
- ◆ Lack of sleep.
- ◆ Having your period.

**Having many vaginal yeast infections may be a sign of other health problems.**



### What are signs of vaginal yeast infections?

- ◆ Itching in the vaginal area.
- ◆ Vaginal discharge. This is mostly white. It can be watery to thick, and even chunky. It does not have a bad smell.
- ◆ Redness, swelling, and burning in the vaginal area.
- ◆ Pain with urination or during sex.

### How do you know if you have an infection?

Yeast infections can be diagnosed during a medical exam. To check for a vaginal yeast infection, your health care provider looks for signs of infection and collects a sample of vaginal fluid for lab tests.

### How is it treated?

Vaginal yeast infections can be treated with medicines such as pills or creams, ovules, or ointments. Treatment may take from 1 to 7 days. Women with weak immune systems or other medical problems may need longer treatment. Always finish treatment, even if the signs of a yeast infection go away. Yeast infections can come back if not treated correctly. Infection is more likely to return if some health problems, such as diabetes, are not under control.

## What can happen if you don't get treated for a yeast infection?

Signs of infection may get worse without treatment. Scratching the vaginal area can leave open or raw areas. These can become infected with other germs.

## How can you avoid vaginal yeast infections?

- ◆ Do not douche.
- ◆ Avoid scented products such as bubble baths, feminine hygiene sprays, pads or tampons.
- ◆ Change pads and tampons often during your period.
- ◆ Do not wear tight clothing. This can cause irritation and sweating in the vaginal area.
- ◆ Wear cotton underwear.
- ◆ Wear pantyhose with a cotton crotch.
- ◆ Change out of wet clothing and swimsuits right away.
- ◆ Keep blood sugar under control if you have diabetes.

## What about pregnancy?

Pregnancy can increase the risk of vaginal yeast infections. Ask your health care provider about safe and effective treatments. Babies born to a mother with a vaginal yeast infection can get a mouth infection (thrush).

### For more on vaginal yeast infections see:

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:*

*Vaginal yeast infections fact sheet*

*[www.womenshealth.gov/faq/vaginal-yeast-infections.cfm](http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/vaginal-yeast-infections.cfm)*

*U.S. National Library of Medicine:*

*Vaginal yeast infection*

*[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001511.htm](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001511.htm)*