

North Carolina Women's Hospital

VAGINAL YEAST INFECTIONS

What is a vaginal yeast infection?

A vaginal yeast infection occurs when there is too much yeast in the vagina. It is a form of vaginitis (vaginal infection). Yeast is always present in the vagina in a small amount, sometimes there is too much yeast and it can cause an infection. Even though yeast infections can be passed during sex, this is not a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

What are the symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection?

Women with a vaginal yeast infection may notice the following:

- Abnormal vaginal discharge that is thick and white, usually described as looking like “cottage cheese.” This discharge usually does not smell bad.
- Itching, burning, redness or irritation in and around the vagina
- Pain with urination or sex

Many vaginal infections have these same symptoms. It is important to talk to your health care provider to decide what the best treatment for your symptoms.

Who is at risk for a vaginal yeast infection?

Some women get yeast infection when they take medications such as:

- antibiotics
- birth control pills
- steroids

Other things can also cause yeast to grow, such as:

- douching
- perfumed soaps or bubble baths
- wearing tight clothing
- sitting in a wet swimsuit or other wet clothing

There are certain health conditions that increase the growth of yeast including:

- diabetes
- pregnancy, especially during the third trimester
- compromised immune system (ability to fight infections) that may be caused by many things, including treatments for cancer, and HIV

What is the treatment for vaginal yeast infections?

There are prescription and non-prescription treatments for vaginal yeast infection. Talk to your health care provider to choose the one best for you. It is very important to finish all of the medicine even if your symptoms are better. You should also avoid sex until you have finished all of the medicine.

How can you lower your risk for a vaginal yeast infection?

To lower your risk for a vaginal yeast infection:

- Wear cotton panties to absorb moisture
- Avoid tight fitting jeans
- Take off swimsuits or other wet clothing as soon as possible
- Avoid douching, vaginal deodorants and sprays
- Keep your blood sugars as close to normal as possible if you are a diabetic
- Ask your provider about probiotics to help prevent yeast infection

If you have further questions about Vaginal Yeast Infections, please discuss your concerns with your health care provider.

Approved by North Carolina Women's Hospital Patient Education Steering Committee May 19, 2009.