

North Carolina Women's Hospital

BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS

What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial vaginosis (also called “BV”) is the most common vaginal infection among women of childbearing age. There is a normal balance of “good” bacteria in the vagina that keep the vaginal tissues healthy. BV occurs when the environment in the vagina becomes unbalanced and there is an overgrowth of bacteria.

What are the symptoms of BV?

Women with BV may notice the following:

- Thin vaginal discharge that is usually white and “milky” or gray in color
- A strong “fish-like” odor from the vaginal area that is often worse after having sex.
- Burning discomfort with urination.
- Itching around the vagina.

Often, women with BV have no symptoms at all.

What causes BV?

- Douching
- Changing sex partners or having multiple sexual partners. However, health experts are not sure if there is a relationship between sexual activity and BV. BV is more common in women who have had vaginal sex, but women who have never had sexual activity can also develop the problem.
- Use of an IUD (intrauterine device) for contraception

What does not cause BV?

You cannot get BV from toilet seats, bedding or swimming pools.

What is the treatment for BV?

BV is treated with prescription antibiotics. In most cases, a woman’s sexual partner will not need to be treated.

- Take all of the medication you are given, even if your symptoms go away.
- If you have problems taking the medication, call your health care provider to find another treatment. Some medications used to treat BV can cause serious problems if you drink alcohol when taking them.

Unfortunately, sometimes women will develop BV again, even after being treated.

Can there be complications from BV?

In most cases, there are no complications from BV. However, you may be at increased risk for the following:

- Contracting STD's (sexually transmitted diseases) if exposed.
- Developing pelvic inflammatory disease ("PID"). This disease is a very serious infection in the uterus and fallopian tubes (female organs).
- During pregnancy, a BV infection can cause preterm labor.

How can you lower your risk for developing BV?

- Do not douche because it washes away the good bacteria in your vagina.
- Limit your number of sexual partners.

If you have any further questions or concerns about BV, please talk to your health care provider.

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