



Trinity Womens Care
GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS

727.372.0006

Mahnee Dinsmore, M.D.

VAGINITIS

A number of different problems may cause inflammation or even infection of the vagina, labia, and other sections of the female private areas. These include bacterial vaginosis, yeast and some sexually-transmitted diseases. If you have had unprotected sex with an unfamiliar partner and now have a discharge that is different from your normal discharge, causes itching or burning, discomfort when urinating, or has a foul odor, please see your health care provider.

What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

Many women mistakenly believe that yeast infections are the most common type of vaginal infection but bacterial vaginosis is the most frequently occurring vaginal infection, affecting from 10% to 64% of the population at any given time.

Although treatment is available which quickly cures this infection, if left untreated bacterial vaginosis may increase a woman's risk of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), endometritis, cervicitis, pregnancy complications, and post-operative infections, among other health conditions.

Bacterial vaginosis occurs most frequently during the reproductive years although women of all ages are susceptible to this infection that affects the vagina, urethra, bladder, and skin in the genital area.

What Causes Bacterial Vaginosis?

Primary causes of bacterial vaginosis include an overgrowth of anaerobic bacteria and the Gardnerella organism. The healthy vagina includes a small amount of these bacteria and organisms. When the vaginal balance is disrupted by the overgrowth of these bacteria another protective bacterium lactobacilli is unable to adequately perform its normal function. Lactobacilli normally provides a natural disinfectant (similar to hydrogen peroxide) which helps maintain the healthy and normal balance of microorganisms in the vagina.

E. coli, which is a normal inhabitant of the rectum, can cause bacterial vaginitis if it is spread to the vaginal area. Other factors which may contribute include hot weather, poor health, poor hygiene, and routine douching.

Risk of bacterial vaginosis increases with menopause and in women with diabetes as well as women whose resistance is lowered due to other conditions.





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A report published in Women's Health Weekly indicates that multiple sex partners may increase a woman's risk of bacterial vaginosis although African-American women with only one partner still have a high prevalence of infection.

What Are the Symptoms of Bacterial Vaginosis?

The most obvious sign of bacterial infection is an unpleasant, foul, sometimes fishy odor. Itching and/or burning sometimes accompany bacterial infections but are not required symptoms for a diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis. Many times women are unaware they are infected until they are diagnosed during a routine pelvic exam and Pap smear.

What is the Treatment for Bacterial Vaginosis?

The good news is that treatment is relatively simple and effective once proper diagnosis is made. Treatment usually consists of three to seven nights of a vaginal cream. Oral antibiotic treatment is sometimes prescribed. Although your symptoms may disappear before you finish your medication it's important that you complete your medication exactly as directed by your practitioner.

Preventing Vaginal Infections

Always wipe from front to back after bowel movements to prevent E. coli from the rectum from entering the vagina. Douching is never a good idea. Douching may disrupt the fragile balance of natural organisms in the vagina which may lead to bacterial or yeast infections and may also cause the spread of infection up into the reproductive tract where it can do damage. Keep the vaginal area clean and dry. Wash before and after sex with mild soap and thoroughly dry the vaginal area to prevent moisture from creating a breeding ground for bacteria. Avoid tight clothing and always wear white cotton panties that help absorb moisture and allow air to circulate. Avoid scented or treated toilet paper, personal hygiene products, perfumes, spermicides, and harsh soaps or detergents if the vaginal area is irritated. Practice safe sex! Always use condoms to prevent STDs or other vaginal infections unless you are in a long-term monogamous relationship. Diaphragms, cervical caps, and medication applicators should be thoroughly cleaned after each use.

Remember, if you experience signs of vaginal infection, it is important that diagnosis is made by a health care practitioner--most vaginal infections are not yeast infections! Self-treatment with over-the-counter remedies for yeast infection will not cure a bacterial infection and may increase your risk of complications.

