

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) (Non Specific Vaginitis; Bacterial Vaginitis)

What is it?

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a common vaginal infection. It is an uneven balance of the normal bacteria in the vagina which lets many other types of germs to grow. The normal balance of the vagina can be affected by stress, frequent vaginal sex, antibiotics and some forms of birth control.

BV tends to occur in sexually active young women. but is not considered to be sexually transmitted..

What are the symptoms?

- half of women with BV have no symptoms even though BV may show up on a test
- fishy odour – sometimes more noticeable after sex
- white or grayish watery vaginal discharge (sometimes large amounts)
- pain, burning or itching in the vagina may occur but is not common

How is it diagnosed?

BV is diagnosed by having swabs taken from the vagina. This is important because there are other vaginal infections with similar symptoms.

How is it treated?

Women with symptoms, high risk pregnancies or those having pelvic surgery or an IUD inserted should be treated. The doctor will prescribe pills such as metronidazole (flagyl) or a special vaginal

cream. Medication (creams) that you can buy in the drugstore for yeast infections do not work for BV.

Do not drink alcohol (wine, beer, liquor) while taking flagyl and for 24 hours after taking medication. Flagyl can cause a metallic taste and dryness in the in the mouth and vagina.

If the infection keeps coming back and is hard to treat, you might want to keep a diary of your symptoms and your activities. This allows you to:

- compare the amount of discharge and other symptoms over time
- see if there are patterns
- link symptoms with activities

Complications

Having BV while having a procedure such as an IUD insertion, biopsy or an abortion has been linked to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). BV in pregnant females may also be associated with premature delivery. If you have BV and will be having pelvic surgery, you must be treated. Having BV may also increase the risk of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) if you are exposed.

See the other side of the page for “Things you can try to help prevent vaginal infections or irritations”.

Use condoms to help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and hepatitis B.

**For more information, call Peel Health at 905-799-7700
and ask for Sexual Health Information
or visit
peelregion.ca/health peelsexualhealth.ca intheknowpeel.ca**

Vaginal Health

What is Normal?

Understanding how the vagina protects itself against infection can help you stay healthy.

The vagina keeps itself healthy and clean by the mucous in the cervix and the acid/alkaline balance (a balance between acidity and alkalinity of all body fluids must be maintained). A healthy vagina is slightly acidic, keeping many kinds of bothersome germs under control.

Mucous produced by the cervix moistens and lubricates the vagina and also plugs the cervical opening. This helps to keep germs out of the uterus.

Normal vaginal discharge has a mild odour and can be yellowish, pasty white or clear and stringy, like egg white. It often leaves a yellow-white stain on underwear. The amount of vaginal discharge is affected by hormones and is different for every woman.

Causes of Infections

Vaginal infections can be caused by:

- unprotected sexual contact, when sexually transmitted germs can be passed from one person to another.
- an uneven balance of the fluid in the vagina, leading to infections such as bacterial vaginosis or yeast.

There are many situations which may cause the fluid imbalance in the vagina, making it easier to grow infections. These include:

1. Less acidity and more alkalinity in the vagina during a menstrual period. Therefore, infections can get worse during or after a period.
2. Being on the birth control pill or being pregnant. Hormonal change increases the alkalinity and the chance of infection.
3. Being on antibiotics. These drugs kill the bad germs but also can destroy the good germs in the vagina. This lets harmful bacteria overgrow in the vagina.
4. Unprotected sex. Semen is alkaline and this helps certain infections to grow. Unprotected sex can bring other germs into the vagina.

5. Douching. This can dry out the mucous membranes, irritate and damage vaginal walls and upset the natural balance. There is no reason to douche.
6. Pad and tampon use. If tampons are left in too long, germs can start to grow. Super-absorbent tampons can dry out the vagina. Pads with plastic lining or perfume can also cause irritation.
7. Foods and drinks high in sugars and carbohydrates such as pop, fruit juices, alcohol, donuts and other sweets. Cells in the vaginal walls contain sugar and this is a perfect place for germs and yeast fungus to grow.
8. Stress, anxiety and lack of sleep can lower your immunity and make it hard for your body to maintain the proper balance.

What Can Be Done to Prevent Vaginal Infections and Irritations?

- Always use condoms for sex.
- Wear cotton underwear. Do not wear thong underwear, except for short periods of time.
- Don't wear underwear to bed; try boxers or pajama bottoms.
- Avoid tight jeans and pants.
- Wash genitals with warm water only and always wash/wipe from front to back. This prevents transferring germs from the anus (bum) to the vagina.
- Never put anything in your vagina that has first been in your anus.
- Rinse well if you need to use soap.
- Avoid all bubble baths, perfumed soaps and feminine hygiene sprays.
- Do not use strong detergents and fabric softeners when washing underwear.
- Never use anyone else's wet towel, washcloth or bathing suit. Change damp gym clothes or bathing suits after your activities.

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