

Yeast Infection

What is a yeast infection?

Yeast infections are a common condition caused by the fungus *Candida albicans*. Yeast infections may occur in the the vagina, mouth, and moist areas on the skin such as under the breasts or between the toes. Vaginal yeast infections are the most common vaginal complaint in women of reproductive age.



What causes yeast infections?

Yeast is normal in and on the body, living in the intestines, vagina, stomach, mouth and on the skin. Normally, other bacteria in the body keep the fungus under control. However, with the right conditions, it can multiply until there is enough to cause symptoms.

Yeast infections can have a variety of causes. These include:



- Taking antibiotics, steroids or estrogen containing medications that may kill the bacteria that normally control the fungus population, allowing it to grow.
- Hormonal changes such as menopause, pregnancy or birth control pills.
- Diabetes, especially if the sugar levels are not well controlled.
- HIV infection.

Many women who develop yeast infections have none of these causes. Yeast infections are not commonly spread by sexual intercourse.

What are the symptoms?

Some women with yeast infections have no symptoms. More commonly, vaginal yeast infections cause a thick, clumpy discharge resembling cottage cheese. They may also cause:

- Itching and swelling of the vagina and labia (vaginal lips)
- Redness
- Pain with urination.
- Painful intercourse

Men may experience swelling and redness on the penis and foreskin. Yeast infections of the penis are more common in uncircumcised men.

Yeast infections are also common in the mouth, especially in newborns. The inside of the mouth will be red and sore and may have white spots and patches on the tongue and lining of the cheek. Yeast infections in newborns are called Thrush. Nursing newborns with thrush may cause a yeast infection in their mother's nipple, causing reddened and very sore nipples.

Skin infected with yeast will have an itchy red rash. The rash may be a red patch with small red bumps around it.

How is yeast diagnosed?



Yeast has a distinctive appearance under a microscope. Your doctor or nurse midwife/nurse practitioner ask questions about your symptoms, birth control, and other factors that affect the health of your vagina. He/she will examine you and take a sample from the mouth, vaginal or other infected area to examine. If you are on your period or have used an over-the-counter vaginal cream, wait a few days before your exam so your healthcare provider is better able to give you a diagnosis.

How is yeast treated?

Medicines are available as creams to put on the skin or in the vagina, tablets and creams to be put in the vagina, and tablets to be taken by mouth.

There are several good over-the counter medications available for treatment of vaginal yeast infections. These include Monistat, Mycelex, Gyne-Lotrimin and FemCare. If you have tried one of these medications without relief, your doctor/nurse midwife/nurse practitioner may prescribe a stronger medication. Yeast medication taken by mouth is available only by prescription.

How can I take help the medication to work?

If you have vaginal candidiasis, avoid sexual intercourse until the infection clears and be sure to follow the full treatment prescribed by your doctor or nurse midwife/nurse practitioner. If you have had a yeast infection previously and recognize the symptoms, try treating yourself with an OTC cream. If your symptoms continue after treatment, if you keep getting yeast infections or if you notice new or unusual symptoms, see a healthcare provider.

What can be done to prevent yeast infections from occurring?

There are a number of things you can do to help yourself:

- Keep moist areas of the body cool and dry.
- Avoid wearing a wet bathing suit or damp clothing for long periods of time.
- Wear loose fitting clothing.
- Avoid douching.
- Avoid bubble baths (scented or unscented).
- Wear cotton underpants.
- Avoid frequent or prolonged use of oral antibiotics if possible.
- Lose weight if you are obese (20% over normal weight).
- Try eating yogurt. Some women find that daily yogurt prevents yeast.
- Avoid high-sugar diets.
- After urinating, wipe gently from front to back to avoid irritation.
- Use unscented soaps.
- Avoid using douches and other chemicals, such as bubble bath or hygiene spray, in the vaginal area unless recommended by your doctor or nurse midwife/nurse practitioner.
- Take a shower instead of a bath. Blow dry the vaginal area after bathing.
- Wear cotton underwear to allow ventilation and to keep the area drier.
- If you are a diabetic, maintain a normal blood sugar.



Remember, although yeast infections are very uncomfortable, they are not dangerous to you or your partner and can be treated.