

VAGINITIS

(Vulvovaginitis; Atrophic Vaginitis)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Vaginitis is an inflammation (pain, redness, and swelling) of the vagina. Types of vaginitis include:

- *Infectious*: this is the most common type and is usually caused by a bacterial infection. It may also be due to a yeast or parasitic infection.
- *Noninfectious*: may be caused by vaginal dryness (atrophic), allergic reaction, or chemical irritation.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- The vagina normally has a thin, whitish or clear discharge which will change if an infection is present:
 - Texture (thick, thin, or curd-like).
 - Color (white, gray, or yellowish).
 - Odor (fishy smell).
 - Amount (heavy or light).
- Itching, burning, irritation, redness, swelling, and possibly pain in the vagina or vulva (external genitals).
- Vaginal dryness (due to atrophy).
- Pain with sexual intercourse.
- Pain and burning when urinating.
- Symptoms may vary with the menstrual cycle.

CAUSES

- Infectious vaginitis causes include: bacterial vaginosis (most common cause), vulvovaginal candidiasis (a yeast infection), or trichomoniasis (a parasitic infection).
- Noninfectious causes include a decrease of natural estrogen (at menopause), an irritant (such as clothes that rub), or an allergic reaction (such as a spermicide).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Use of antibiotic drugs.
- Spermicide or use of an intrauterine device (IUD).
- Sexual intercourse.
- Having multiple sex partners.
- Douching.
- Changes in hormone levels (pregnancy, breast-feeding, menopause, using birth-control pills).

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wear underwear and pantyhose with a cotton crotch. Avoid wearing tight jeans, pants, or panty hose.
- Keep your genital area clean and dry. Don't douche.
- Don't sit around in a wet bathing suit.
- Avoid perfumed or deodorant soap, detergents, fabric softeners, bubble baths, powder, and vaginal sprays.
- Always wipe away from the vagina—front to back—after bowel movements.
- Use a latex condom for sexual intercourse unless you and your partner are monogamous (having one mate).

EXPECTED OUTCOME

With treatment, symptoms usually clear up in 3 to 4 days.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Vaginitis may recur after treatment.
- Without treatment, infections can lead to more serious medical problems, be a risk factor for sexual transmitted disease, or cause pregnancy complications.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Don't assume you have a yeast infection and use antifungal drugs to self-treat without a diagnosis. Those drugs won't help other types of infection. In addition, a vaginal infection should not be self-treated with herbal remedies, douches, or deodorant sprays.
- Your health care provider will usually do a physical exam, a pelvic exam, and ask questions about your symptoms. Tests may be done of the vaginal discharge.
- Treatment will depend on the cause of the vaginitis. Drugs are usually prescribed for infections and sometimes for vaginal dryness or irritation. Your sexual partner needs treatment if trichomoniasis is the cause.
- If the vaginitis is due to an irritant or allergic reaction, stop using the offending product.
- To learn more: National Women's Health Information Center (800) 994-9662; website: www.4women.gov.

MEDICATION

- For infection, an antibiotic, antifungal, or antiparasitic drug may be prescribed. Take the entire drug course prescribed even if symptoms improve in a few days.
- For vaginal dryness, estrogen creams or oral tablets may be recommended.
- For vaginal irritation, steroid or hormone creams may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

It is best to avoid sexual intercourse until treatment is complete. No other limits on activity.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of vaginitis.
- Symptoms recur following treatment.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page