

VAGINOSIS, BACTERIAL

(Gardnerella Vaginitis; Nonspecific Vaginitis)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Vaginosis is an infection of the vagina. Bacterial vaginosis (BV) means that bacteria are the cause of the infection. It affects all ages, but it most often occurs during the childbearing years. It is not thought to be a sexually transmitted disease (STD), but sexual activity has been linked to this infection. It may cause vaginitis that has symptoms of soreness, itching, and irritation.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- About 50% of women have no symptoms.
- Vaginal discharge that may have an unpleasant odor (referred to as a "fishy" smell). The color and amount of discharge varies from woman to woman.

CAUSES

Normally, there are a number of harmless bacteria in the vagina. They may help protect against other infections such as yeast infection. These harmless bacteria sometimes get out of balance and undesirable bacteria are able to grow. Why this occurs is unknown. Undesirable bacteria types are *Gardnerella vaginalis*, *Mycoplasma hominis*, and *Mobiluncus species*.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD).
- Smokers.
- Early age at first intercourse.
- Higher number of lifetime sexual partners.
- New sexual partner, or increase in number of sexual partners in the month before diagnosis.
- Recent use of antibiotic drugs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- There are no specific preventive measures. The following general measures may help to prevent bacterial vaginosis or other vaginal disorders.
- Use condoms with new sexual partners to help protect against infections, possibly bacterial vaginosis.
- Keep the genital area clean and dry. Use plain unscented soap. Be sure sexual partner is clean. Avoid vaginal douching.
- Take showers rather than tub baths. If you take a bath, don't add oils or bubble bath to the water.
- Wear cotton underwear or pantyhose with a cotton crotch.
- Don't sit around in wet clothes, such as a bathing suit.
- After going to the bathroom, wipe from front to back (vagina to anus).
- Change tampons or sanitary pads frequently.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Mild cases may get better without treatment. Treatment can relieve symptoms in other cases, but recurrence is common.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- May recur, but it can be retreated.
- Infection with another vaginal disorder.
- Increased risk of infection with uterine surgery.
- May cause problems with pregnancy and delivery.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam including a pelvic exam. Because some women have no symptoms of the infection, it may be diagnosed on a routine exam. Medical tests may include studies of vaginal discharge and a Pap smear.
- Treatment is usually recommended for women who have symptoms and women who will be having surgical procedures.
- For pregnant women with the infection, your obstetric provider will discuss the diagnosis, risks, and treatment recommendations when needed.
- If you smoke, find a stop smoking plan that will work for you.
- Testing and treating male sexual partners is usually not needed.
- Douches or deodorant sprays that mask vaginal odor should not be used to treat BV. They may eliminate the odor, but they will not cure the condition.
- To learn more: National Women's Health Information Center (800) 994-9662; website: www.4women.gov.

MEDICATION

Metronidazole (Flagyl) or clindamycin (Cleocin) are often prescribed for treatment of bacterial vaginosis. They are available in both an oral and topical form.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has a vaginal discharge.
- Symptoms persist longer than 1 week or worsen, despite treatment.
- Unusual vaginal bleeding or swelling develops.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page