

VULVOVAGINITIS, CANDIDIASIS

(Vaginal Yeast Infection)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Vulvovaginal candidiasis is an infection of the vagina and vulva (external genitals). It can affect women of all ages but occurs most often in the childbearing years. Men may have candidiasis infection with no symptoms.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- The symptoms vary among women and from time to time, in the same woman.
- White, "curdy" vaginal discharge (resembles lumps of cottage cheese). Odor may be unpleasant, but not foul.
- Swollen, red, tender, itching vaginal lips (labia) and surrounding skin.
- Burning during urination.
- Change in vaginal color from pale pink to red.
- Pain during sexual intercourse (dyspareunia).

CAUSES

Most often, the cause is a yeast-like fungus called *Candida albicans*. Healthy women have this yeast in their vagina (and the mouth and intestines). If the normal conditions of the vagina change, the yeast can overgrow and cause infection. Rarely, *Candida* may be passed from person to person, by sexual intercourse.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Pregnancy.
- Diabetes.
- Drugs (antibiotics, corticosteroids, birth control pills).
- Weak immune system from drugs or disease.
- Recent illness, poor diet, or lack of sleep.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- There are no specific preventive measures. The following steps may help to prevent vaginal disorders.
- Use condoms with new sexual partners to help protect against some infections.
- 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. Avoid tight jeans, pants, or pantyhose.
- Don't sit around in wet clothes, such as bathing suits.
- After going to the bathroom, wipe from front to back (vagina to anus).
- Change tampons or sanitary pads frequently.
- Take antibiotics only when prescribed for you.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Symptoms will normally clear up with treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- It may cause vaginitis (soreness, itching, and irritation).

- Some women may develop recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis (RVVC). This is when four or more episodes of vulvovaginal candidiasis have occurred in one year.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Don't assume you have a yeast infection and use anti-fungal (yeast) drugs to self-treat without a diagnosis. Also, a vaginal infection should not be self-treated with douches, deodorant sprays, or herbal remedies.
- Your health care provider will usually do a physical exam and a pelvic exam and ask questions about your symptoms. Tests of the vaginal discharge may be done.
- Drug therapy is usually recommended.
- If urinating causes burning, urinate through a tubular device, such as a toilet-paper roll or plastic cup with the bottom cut out, or pour a cup of warm water over the genital area while you urinate.
- To learn more: National Women's Health Information Center (800) 994-9662; website: www.4women.gov.

MEDICATION

- Antifungal drugs, either in vaginal creams or suppositories or in oral form, may be recommended. Some nonprescription examples are miconazole nitrate (Monistat-7) and clotrimazole (Gyne-Lotrimin, Mycelex-7, and FemCare). Follow the instructions on the product. If you have tried one of these drugs and it has not worked for you, your health care provider may prescribe a prescription-only drug.
- Recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis treatment usually involves two weeks of intensive antifungal drugs, then up to six months of a lower "maintenance" dose.

ACTIVITY

Delay sexual relations until symptoms clear up.

DIET

Some women find that eating yogurt or a low sugar diet can help in preventing or treating yeast infections.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of vulvovaginal candidiasis.
- Symptoms get worse or recur.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page