

New York State Department of Health

Yeast Infection

Last Reviewed: November 2006

What causes a yeast infection?

A yeast infection is the second most common cause of vaginal discharge for women in the United States.

Most of the time this infection is caused by a tiny fungus called "*Candida albicans*," "*Candida*," or yeast. It is normal to have a small amount of *Candida* in your vagina. Most people also have *Candida* in their mouth and lower intestinal tract. This fungus usually causes no symptoms. A healthy vagina has a balance between healthy bacteria and unhealthy organisms. An infection occurs when something happens to allow the *Candida* fungus to outnumber the healthy bacteria in your vagina. When a woman has too much *Candida* in her vagina, then we say she has a yeast infection. A yeast infection is not considered a sexually transmitted disease (STD) because you don't have to have sex to get it.

Your vagina's healthy balance may be upset by any of the following:

- Birth control pills
- Antibiotics
- Pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Deodorant tampons or perfumed douches
- Wearing tight clothes or synthetics such as nylon, spandex or LYCRA®. These fabrics may create too much warmth and moisture from sweating. Yeast grows best in warm, moist places. Wear loose cotton clothing instead.
- HIV infection

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Vaginal itching with or without irritation
- A thick, white fluid (discharge) that looks like cottage cheese and has very little odor
- Redness, swelling, and soreness of the vaginal opening and around the opening
- Burning when urinating
- Pain during intercourse

How will I know if I have a yeast infection?

To know for sure, you should visit a health care provider. He or she will give you a pelvic exam and take a sample of your discharge. A microscope will be used to look at your discharge in the office or it will be sent to a lab for testing. There are other types of vaginal infections with symptoms similar to a yeast infection but they will not respond to medicine for a yeast infection. This is why it is important to visit a health care provider so you can be sure what infection you have.

Is there a cure?

Yes. Usually, your health care provider will ask you to insert an antifungal cream or a suppository inside your vagina at night for three to seven nights. Many of these creams are available without a prescription. Your provider can recommend the best treatment. If you would rather take a pill by mouth, you may ask your health care provider for a pill called fluconazole (floo kon' na zole).

What about my partner(s)?

Usually, your sex partners do not need to be examined. However, if your infection keeps coming back, or if your partner has symptoms, your health care provider will also want to examine your partners.

When can I have sex again?

It is best to wait to have any kind of sex - oral, vaginal or anal - until you have taken all of your medicine and all of your symptoms have gone away.

Can I get this infection again?

Yes. It's not uncommon to have a second yeast infection, although it's rare to have repeated infections.

How can I prevent yeast infections?

It is very important to keep a normal, healthy balance of bacteria in your vagina. You can help by:

- Keeping your genital area clean and dry;
- Wearing cotton underwear and loosefitting pants (these keep you dry by allowing air to flow through them), and
- Avoiding douches or other feminine hygiene products.

To learn more:

If you have more questions about yeast infections, or you want to know how to find a clinic near you, contact your local health department.

You may also call the National STD Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO 1-800-232-4636

Questions or comments: stdc@health.state.ny.us

Revised: May 2005