

Symptoms

Yeast infections cause mild to intolerable vulvar or vaginal itching or burning in females. You may notice a cottage cheese-like white vaginal discharge or an unusual vaginal dryness. Intercourse may be painful and you may notice external burning with urination. Some women notice that these symptoms appear or increase around menstruation time.

The male partner may also have symptoms. He might have itching or burning about the head of the penis, scaly moist rash on the penis or scrotum or burning on urination.

Cause

The yeast that causes the infection is normally present in the vagina. A yeast infection happens when normal “ecology” of the vagina is disrupted in such a way that the yeast overgrows the bacteria that are present in a healthy vagina. Yeast infections occur in women who have never had sexual intercourse as well as sexually active women.

A variety of factors can contribute to the overgrowth of yeast.

- Use of certain medications can predispose women to yeast infections. Antibiotics destroy healthy bacteria in the vagina allowing the yeast to overgrow. Systemic corticosteroids, immunosuppressants suppress the body’s ability to fight infection. Anticancer drugs also suppress the body’s ability to fight infection.
- Wiping from back to front can contaminate the vagina with stool from the rectum. The intestinal tract frequently contains yeast.
- A male partner may harbor yeast and transmit it during sexual intercourse by his penis or oral secretions if you practice oral intercourse. Anal intercourse can transmit both yeast and bacteria if you do not wash properly before resuming vaginal intercourse.
- A diet high in dairy products, citrus fruits, yeast foods, artificial sweeteners and refined sugars can contribute to vaginal symptoms in some women. These foods might increase the excretion of sugars in the urine that can promote infection.
- Diabetes mellitus and other chronic disease may suppress the body’s ability to fight infection.
- Douching frequently or using perfumed soaps, feminine hygiene sprays or powders often dry and irritate the lining of the vagina and cause an imbalance of normal flora.
- Tight fitting clothing, nylon underpants trap moisture and foster growth of yeast.
- The hormonal changes in pregnancy favor growth of yeast.
- Changes in hormonal balance around the time of menstruation favor the growth of yeast before menses each month.

Treatment

A clinician bases treatment not only on the patient's symptoms but also on physical examination and microscopic examination of the vaginal discharge.

Your clinician will prescribe a medication for you to insert into the vagina or oral agents to decrease the fungal growth and relieve the symptoms. This medication will quickly relieve your symptoms and it is very important that you complete the medication.

The following instructions will aid in treatment as well as prevent future infections:

- Do not interrupt treatment during menstrual period and do not use tampons during treatment with vaginal medications.
- Wear cotton underclothing. Avoid pantyhose and tight-fitting pants.
- Do not use feminine sprays or powders and douche only when instructed by your doctor or nurse clinician.
- Keep the area around the vagina clean and dry. Wash carefully from front to back several times each day and particularly before intercourse.
- Brush teeth and rinse with mouth wash before intercourse.
- Do not have intercourse if to do so is irritating or painful.
- Have your partner use condoms until the infection is gone.

Prevention

If you are prone to developing yeast infections, try these measures.

- Avoid use of tampons.
- Use condoms during intercourse.

Self Treatment

There are other types of vaginal infections that cause a discharge with itching. Reactions to the chemicals that are in some feminine products also cause itching about the vagina. To be certain that the discharge and itching are caused by yeast, the yeast must be seen with a microscope.

When you have symptoms, douche once a day for 3 days with a solution of 2 Tbs. baking soda mixed into one quart of warm water.

You can now buy effective medications for treatment of yeast infections without an examination or prescription, Gyne-Lotrimin and Monistat are two medications that until recently had to be prescribed by a physician. There are also medications on the drug store shelf that are not appropriate treatments. Yeast Gard is totally ineffective. If you read the Yeast Gard package carefully you will learn that it is not a treatment for yeast. Cortef Feminine Itch Medication and Gynecort are medications that contain cortisone and are not intended to treat yeast. Vagisil contains medications that relieves the burning but does not destroy the yeast. When you buy medications without advice you may waste money. If yeast is causing the itching and discharge the symptoms should be cleared with three days of the proper medication. If the symptoms do not quickly clear or if they soon return it would be better if you did have an examination for proper diagnosis and treatment.