

Vaginitis

Description

Vaginitis is a general term that applies to any kind of vaginal inflammation or infection. Symptoms may include genital irritation or itching, burning sensations during urination, painful intercourse, or a significant change in the odor and/or consistency of vaginal discharge.

Vaginitis is not always caused by a sexually transmitted infection. Most cases of Vaginitis are due to organisms that normally reside in the vagina but may overgrow and cause the above symptoms. Some factors that increase the risk of vaginal infections include:

- Recent antibiotic use
- Birth control pill use
- Immune system suppression by medication or infection (i.e., HIV)

Ninety percent of the time Vaginitis occurs as a result of the following infections:

- Bacterial Vaginosis
- Candidiasis (Yeast Infection)
- Trichomoniasis

Reducing the risk of Vaginitis

Do's

- Wear 100% cotton underwear for better absorption and better air circulation. Nylon underwear retains heat and moisture that stimulate growth of harmful bacteria.
- Take a warm, soapless tub bath to soothe irritated tissue in the vaginal area.
- If using prescribed vaginal medication, (creams, suppositories) continue to use when menstruating unless otherwise advised. Also, continue using until the medication is gone. **DO NOT** discontinue when symptoms improve.
- Additionally, condom use helps reduce reinfection.

Don'ts

- Don't wear tight fitting clothing (i.e., body suits, tight jeans) that can inhibit air circulation and cause friction.
- Don't use perfumed products that can cause chemical irritation to the vaginal area (i.e., soaps, powders, perfumed/deodorized tampons, colored perfumed toilet paper, feminine deodorant sprays, douches.) **Even if there is no Vaginitis, these products should be avoided!**
- Don't rub or scratch the vaginal area vigorously since this will only increase discomfort and the risk of a secondary infection.
- Don't ever use anyone else's medication, or use antibiotics when not prescribed.
- Avoid diets high in sugar and refined carbohydrates, since they alter the normal pH balance of the vagina.
- Don't self-treat vaginal discharge or discomfort without a gynecologic exam. Don't assume a vaginal infection is due to yeast.

Sexual Intercourse

- If being treated for a vaginal infection, use condoms throughout treatment.
- If experiencing vaginal irritation during intercourse, use well lubricated condoms and/or extra water or silicone based lubricants or abstain until irritation subsides.
- If you have problems lubricating during intercourse, use silicone or water-based lubricant to decrease friction.

DO NOT use Vaseline or oil based products because they are not water soluble and cannot be used with condoms.

Douching

DO NOT DOUCHE.

Douching can destroy necessary vaginal secretions which help protect the vagina from bacteria and viruses. Recent studies on douching indicate that women who douche increase their risk of pelvic inflammatory disease.

Diagnosis

Before seeing a health care provider regarding a vaginal infection, be sure to follow these guidelines to ensure accurate diagnosis:

- Within 24 hours before an exam, do not:
- Douche
- Use tampons
- Insert vaginal medication
- Take a bath
- Have vaginal intercourse

In addition, wait at least 24 hours after the last day of your period before seeing a health care provider.

A vaginal exam will be performed and a sample of vaginal discharge and cervical mucous will be obtained with a cotton swab. Some tests will be available immediately while others take several days.

Treatment

Vaginal infections can be treated with various prescription and over the counter pills, creams, ointments and suppositories. Treatment depends on the cause of the infection. Yeast or bacterial Vaginosis is treated with vaginal or oral medication. Trichomoniasis is treated with oral antibiotics. The medication should be used for the ENTIRE course of treatment (until the medication is GONE) even if symptoms improve.

If you choose to treat yourself with an over-the-counter vaginal medication, make sure all your symptoms are completely gone by 7 days. Those women who are still experiencing discomfort or discharge after this time need to be examined. Not completing treatment as prescribed is a common cause for recurrence. DO NOT discontinue medication when menstruating unless otherwise advised.

For More Information:

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