

Yeast Infections Symptoms, Causes & Treatments

Many women feel that the presence of a vaginal infection reflects poorly on their personal hygiene. Whether it is due to this apprehension or because they want to relieve their symptoms as quickly as possible, as many as two thirds of women avoid an assessment by a healthcare provider, diagnose themselves, and attempt to treat their condition with an over-the-counter product. Unfortunately, many of these women actually have another form of vaginitis and don't get the treatment they need. Whether over the phone or in the office, women must understand the importance of a proper diagnosis and correct treatment.

Here are a few points to make to help put your patients at ease when initiating a discussion of a possible vaginal yeast infection (24,25):.

- Vaginal yeast infections are common—3 of 4 women will get a yeast infection at one point in their lives.
- 45% of women will have more than one vaginal yeast infection
- You've seen it before—10% of all OB/GYN visits are due to vaginal infections; to you, making this sort of assessment is very routine
- Yeast infections don't necessarily result from poor hygiene—many other factors can cause a yeast infection and anyone can get one from a variety of common causes

The office visit represents more than just the best way to properly diagnose and treat a vaginal yeast infection from the outset; it's an opportunity to educate patients about the reasons they may have developed their infection, clear up any misconceptions they have about yeast infections, and inform them about ways they can prevent recurrence. In cases where a yeast infection does recur, patients should understand the importance of returning for a proper evaluation.

The following discussion guides present key points to cover when you discuss vaginal yeast infections and treatments.

Yeast infection symptoms (26)

Symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection in women may be mild or very uncomfortable. The most frequent symptoms may include:

- Vaginal itching (especially at night)
- Vaginal discharge that is usually described as looking like cottage cheese; it does not have a bad odor
- Vaginal burning and redness
- Pain, usually noticeable during urination or intercourse

Common causes (26,27)

It's a common misconception that vaginal yeast infections are a direct result of "being unclean." While yeast infections can result from poor hygiene, there are a number of reasons why they occur. Vaginal yeast infections are caused by an overgrowth of yeast cells in the vagina. The following is a list of common causes that can lead to this overgrowth

- Menstrual period
- Stress
- Tight-fitting pants and synthetic fibers
- Being overweight
- Douching
- Pregnancy and use of oral contraceptives (birth control pills)
- Antibiotic drug use
- Vaginal burning and redness
- Steroid drug use
- Diabetes mellitus
- Weakened immune system*

*A weakened immune system can be caused by poor diet, stress, or lack of sleep. However, conditions such as immune system disorders, HIV infection, and diabetes can also weaken the immune system.

What can patients do to prevent yeast infections? (26,28,29)

DONT'S	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't wear a wet bathing suit or sweaty gym clothes for too long• Don't wear tight-fitting pants, jeans, or pantyhose• Don't use douches, feminine sprays, perfumed tampons, deodorant pads, bubble bath, or colored or perfumed toilet paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do wipe from front to back• Do dry off well after a shower• Do change tampons frequently• Do wear cotton underwear

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