

Bacterial Vaginosis / Vaginitis

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Your Guide to [Women's Health](#).

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What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis or vaginitis is an inflammation which occurs in the vagina and includes several strains of germ that cause bacterial vaginosis yeast infections and trichomoniasis. Many women mistakenly believe that yeast infections are the most common type of vaginal infection but bacterial vaginosis is the most frequently occurring vaginal infection affecting from 10 percent to 64 percent of the female population at any given time.

Although treatment is available which quickly cures bacterial vaginosis, if left untreated bacterial vaginosis may increase a woman's risk of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), endometritis, cervicitis, pregnancy complications, and post-operative infections among other health conditions.

Bacterial vaginosis occurs most during the reproductive years although women of all ages are susceptible to this infection that affects the vagina, urethra, bladder, and skin in the genital area.

What Causes Bacterial Vaginosis?

Primary causes of bacterial vaginosis include an overgrowth of anaerobic bacteria and the Gardnerella organism.

The healthy vagina includes a small amount of these bacteria and organisms. When the vaginal balance is disrupted by the overgrowth of these bacteria another protective bacterium -- lactobacilli is unable to adequately perform its normal function. Lactobacilli normally provides a natural disinfectant (similar to hydrogen peroxide) which helps maintain the healthy and normal balance of microorganisms in the vagina.

E. coli which is a normal inhabitant of the rectum can cause bacterial vaginitis if it is spread to the vaginal area. Other factors which may contribute include hot weather, poor health, poor hygiene, use of an intrauterine device (IUD) for birth control, and routine vaginal douching.

Risk of bacterial vaginosis increases with menopause, and in women with diabetes, as well as women whose resistance is lowered due to other conditions.

A report published in *Women's Health Weekly* indicates that multiple sex partners may increase a woman's risk of bacterial vaginosis although African-American women with only one partner still have a high prevalence of infection.

What are the Symptoms of Bacterial Vaginosis?

The most obvious sign of bacterial infection is an unpleasant foul, often fishy odor. Itching and/or burning sometimes accompany bacterial infections, but are not a required symptom for a diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis.

Many times women are unaware they are infected until they are diagnosed during a routine pelvic exam and Pap smear. It is important that you don't use vaginal douches during the few days preceding your visit to your gynecologist as douching can hide signs of infection and may make bacterial vaginosis infections worse.

What is the Treatment for Bacterial Vaginosis?

The good news is that treatment is relatively simple and effective once proper diagnosis is made. Treatment usually consists of three to seven nights of Cleocin 2% vaginal cream. Oral antibiotic treatment is sometimes prescribed and may be available if you request it from your physician. Although your symptoms may disappear before you finish your medication it's important that you complete your medication exactly as directed by your physician.

What Can I Do to Prevent Future Vaginal Infections?

There are many steps you can take to prevent future vaginal infections. Try some of these before you get your next vaginal infection.

- Always wipe from front to back after bowel movements to prevent E. coli from the rectum from entering the vagina.
- Douching is never a good idea. Douching may disrupt the fragile balance of natural organisms in the vagina which may lead to bacterial or yeast infection and may also cause the spread of infection up into the reproductive tract where it can do damage.
- Keep the vaginal area clean and dry. Wash before and after sex with an antibacterial cleanser and thoroughly dry the vaginal area to prevent moisture from creating a breeding ground for bacteria.
- Avoid tight clothing and always wear white cotton panties that help absorb moisture and allow air to circulate.
- Avoid scented or treated toilet paper personal hygiene products perfumes spermicides and harsh soaps or detergents if the vaginal area is irritated.
- Practice safe sex! Always use condoms to prevent STDs or other vaginal infections unless you are in a long-term monogamous relationship.
- Diaphragms cervical caps and medication applicators should be thoroughly cleaned after each use.

Remember if you experience signs of a vaginal infection it is important that diagnosis is made by a physician -- most vaginal infections are not yeast infections! Self-treatment with over-the-counter (OTC) remedies for yeast infections will not cure a bacterial infection and may increase your risk of complications.