

## Vaginitis

Vaginitis is an inflammation of the vaginal tissues. Common organisms that produce infection under the right circumstances include yeast (Candida), Trichomonas, and Gardnerella. Many of these organisms live in the vagina normally, and only when they increase in growth and disrupt the balance of the normal vaginal flora do they cause infection. Anything that disrupts the pH balance or bacterial balance of the vagina can result in an infection

### **Signs and Symptoms**

Common signs and symptoms of vaginitis include a burning or itching sensation, sometimes accompanied by a change or increase in vaginal discharge

### **Causes**

- Repeated intercourse over a short period of time  
Semen is a buffered alkaline fluid, with a pH of approximately 9. One episode of intercourse can increase the vaginal pH for 8 hours. When vaginal pH is higher than normal for long periods of time, the normal bacterial balance can be lost and result in infection.
- **Chronic vulvar dampness**  
The vulva sweats more than any other place in the body, especially in a woman who is emotionally stressed. Thus wearing restrictive, non-absorbent, synthetic clothing close to the skin of the vulvar area can contribute to chafing and subsequent infection. This is especially true if a woman exercises in this type of clothing.
- **Chemical irritants**  
Chemicals can be irritating and can create a disturbance in the vaginal balances. Examples of chemical irritants are: scented, softened or colour toilet paper; bubble baths or scented bath salts, deodorized sanitary pads, chemicals in swimming pools and hot tubs; douches and vulvar deodorants.
- **Emotional stress**  
Periods of stress, especially in their relationship, can cause some women's bodies to respond with a vaginal infection.
- **Antibiotics**  
Every time we take an antibiotic, we disrupt the natural balance of organisms in the vagina or bowel, and an infection, either full-blown or chronic, can result. Antibiotics may be necessary at times to prevent vaginitis, and it is recommended if this is the case to take acidophilus to help prevent a subsequent infection.
- **Diet**  
Eating a lot of food made with refined sugar and flour can result in an overgrowth of vaginal yeast. Dairy products can also contribute to yeast vaginitis in some women because of their high lactose (milk sugar) content, which favours the overgrowth of yeast in the bowel and vagina.
- General lowered resistance (from stress, lack of sleep, other infections in our bodies)
- Birth control pills or other hormones
- Diabetes
- Cuts, abrasions or other irritants in the vagina (from childbirth, intercourse without enough lubrication, tampons)

## Treatments

### ➤ **Yeast infections (also see Yeast Infection handouts)**

Boric acid capsules inserted into the vagina nightly for five nights works well to clear up many yeast infections. Anti-fungal vaginal tablets or creams can be purchased over the counter. Monistat is not recommended for use in the first trimester of pregnancy. One-day treatments are not recommended in pregnancy, 5 or 7-day treatments are preferred. Taking acidophilus supplements can also help with the regrowth of normal vaginal flora. The male partner should also be treated, or a condom used until symptoms disappear, to prevent the infection from being passed back and forth between the couple.

### ➤ **Trichomonas infection**

Antifungal vaginal creams may provide some relief from symptoms during pregnancy. Metronidazole (Flagyl), the oral antibiotic is available by prescription that is the usual treatment for this infection is not recommended in the first trimester of pregnancy. Other possible treatments for this include: garlic suppositories (cloves of garlic wrapped in gauze and inserted into the vagina), taking baths, without bubbles; and wearing loose clothing as exposure to air will destroy the parasites responsible for the infection.

### ➤ **Bacterial Vaginosis** (formally called Gardnerella)

Symptoms may be relieved by the use of yogurt, both orally and vaginally. Taking vitamins B and C may also help. Metronidazole (Flagyl), the oral antibiotic available by prescription that is generally used to treat this type of vaginitis is not recommended in the first trimester of pregnancy. Also, clindamycin can be used and is safe in all trimesters.

### **Preventing the reoccurrence of vaginitis**

- Eat a whole foods diet. Avoid coffee, alcohol, sugar and refined foods
- Avoid pantyhose when possible, or cut out the crotch
- Douching is not recommended. (The exception is for specific situations or after intercourse to prevent infection- if douching during pregnancy the following precautions should be observed: 1. Never use a hand bulb syringe as deaths from air embolisms have been reported. 2. The douche bag should never be placed more than 2 feet above the level of the hips to prevent high fluid pressure. 3. The nozzle should not be inserted more than 3 inches into the vulva)
- Avoid talcum powder
- Avoid pants that are tight in the crotch or thighs
- Use a sterile, water soluble jelly if lubrication is needed during intercourse (e.g. K-Y jelly, Astroglide).
- Avoid sexual intercourse that is painful or abrasive to your vagina
- Avoid tampons