

What You Should Know About ...

Bacterial Vaginosis

See Glossary section for definitions of underlined words.

What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

- Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a common infection in the vagina.
- It is normal for bacteria to live in your vagina.
- Bacterial vaginosis happens when the natural balance of bacteria in your vagina is upset.

How do you get BV?

- BV is not a sexually transmitted infection. However, it is most commonly spread by frequent vaginal sex.
- It can also happen if the balance of bacteria in the vagina is upset. This can result from emotional stress, antibiotics, some foods, and some forms of birth control.

What are the symptoms?

- About half of the women who have BV have no symptoms.
- The other half may experience pain, burning or itching in the vagina or while urinating (peeing). They may notice a white or grayish vaginal discharge and/or a fishy odor. These symptoms are usually worse immediately after vaginal intercourse.

How is it diagnosed?

- Your health care provider can often diagnose BV just by looking at a woman's vaginal discharge. The discharge is collected by painlessly taking a swab from inside the vagina.
- The discharge can also be looked at under a microscope or sent to a lab to be tested.

Can this cause any other infections or diseases for me or my partner?

- There are usually no complications
- BV is sometimes linked to a condition called Pelvic Inflammatory Disease.
- In a pregnant woman, BV may cause premature labour and/or a vaginal infection after she delivers her baby.
- Although male partners are not treated for BV, women should avoid sex while they are being treated.

What is the treatment?

- A health care provider will prescribe you some antibiotic pills. Creams to treat yeast infections do not work for bacterial vaginosis.
- Do not drink alcohol while being treated or for 1 day after your treatment. The medication should never be mixed with alcohol.

What is douching and is it a good way to clean my vagina?

- Douching (pronounced dooshing) is cleaning the vagina by squirting a mixture inside the vagina.
- Douching can be harmful. It washes away the healthy bacteria you need in your vagina. Douching may make BV worse.
- The vagina is self-cleansing. Regular baths and showers are enough to clean it.
- See your health provider if you notice a smell or see an unusual discharge. Ask to be tested for infections.

How can I keep my vagina healthy and avoid BV?

- Eat a well balanced diet.
- Do not use pads with perfumes, or vaginal deodorants.
- Do not take bubble baths.
- Try not to wear tight pants for long periods of time. Avoid underwear made of synthetic fibers (rayon, nylon, spandex). Both these things do not allow your vagina to breathe and can irritate it causing infections.
- Use condoms for sex and try to pee as soon as possible after sex to flush away bacteria.
- Do not wear underwear to bed. This allows a lot of air-flow around your vagina to keep it healthy.
- Make sure you and your partner(s) are tested for all sexually transmitted infections to ensure your overall good health.

Where can I go to get tested?

- Your health care provider
- Walk-in clinic
- Teen clinic.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse.
- From the Facts of Life On-Line: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.

Glossary:

Birth Control – The different ways of preventing pregnancy.

Discharge – The release of any substance from anywhere on the body.

Pelvic inflammatory diseases (PID) – An infection of the uterus, the fallopian tubes or ovaries, which is caused by bacteria. It can lead to infertility if left untreated. Early treatment of PID is the most effective way to prevent infertility and other complications.

Vagina - The muscular tube inside a woman's body where the menstrual blood comes out from the uterus, where a baby comes out from the uterus during childbirth, and where a penis can go in for vaginal intercourse.

Yeast infections – A common vaginal infection for women when the yeast which is found in the vagina grows in large amounts.