

Dealing with Bacterial Vaginosis

What is it?

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a type of vaginal infection. There are a lot of organisms that live in a healthy vagina. Some are considered "good" bacteria, like Lactobacillus; they help keep the vagina acidic. Other bacteria can cause an infection in the vagina when there are too many.

Symptoms

Common symptoms of BV:

- a lot of greyish-white or milky discharge
- a bad or fishy odour, especially after sex

Less common symptoms:

- itching or burning in or near the vagina
- burning when you urinate or during intercourse

Treatment

It's not a good idea to use medication for a vaginal infection unless you know what is causing it. What looks like a yeast infection may be BV. See your doctor or go to a Sexual Health Clinic.

If you have symptoms, the doctor will probably treat you with medication. The most common medication used is called Flagyl. You should not drink any alcohol while you are taking this medication and for 48 hours after you have finished all the pills. (Alcohol can react with Flagyl and cause nausea and vomiting.) It is important to tell your doctor if you are pregnant; they will use a different medication. BV is not considered a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD); however BV is more common in women who have had sexual intercourse.



Possible complications

Although many doctors do not treat a woman if she does not have symptoms, more and more are recommending treatment.

Research shows:

- a link between BV and Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID). This means the infection can spread to the uterus and fallopian tubes. This risk is higher after IUD insertion, an abortion or other gynaecological surgeries.
- a link between BV and premature birth or early breaking of the amniotic sac (your "waters")
- a possible link between BV infection and an increased risk of becoming HIV positive if you are exposed to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS

How to avoid future infections

It is important to keep your vagina healthy. Your vagina cleans itself. You do not need to douche, use feminine hygiene spray or wash with soap inside the vagina.

- Don't douche unless your doctor recommends it. Douching increases your chance of getting BV. It changes the normal acid balance in the vagina.
- Wear cotton underwear. Avoid tight pants (especially those with spandex) and synthetic underwear.
- Use condoms and lubricant for sexual intercourse.

Other info sheets in this series:

Avoiding bladder infections

Avoiding vaginal infections

Avoiding vaginal yeast infections

Normal vaginal fluids

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