

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) and Candidiasis (Thrush)

Information for patients



Causes of BV

BV is caused by a disruption to the natural balance of healthy bacteria (lactobacilli) found within the vagina. A reduction in lactobacilli combined with an overgrowth of bacteria that are usually present in small numbers (anaerobes) may result in a change in the normal discharge.

This is not a sexually transmitted infection. It is usually related to vaginal pH.

Around 1.2 million people in the UK (15%) suffer from BV symptoms in a year.

BV is likely to come back if you wash the genital skin too much or with something too strong. It is more common in smokers.

More than half of people treated for BV with antibiotics will get it again within 3 months.

Causes of thrush

Thrush is caused by an overgrowth of a yeast called *Candida albicans*. This organism is found on the genital skin normally. If there is too much of it, it can cause symptoms.

This is not a sexually transmitted infection and is very common. Around three-quarters of people will have thrush at some point in their lives. It is harmless, but it can be uncomfortable.

Most people have a small amount of *Candida albicans* in their bodies. However, it is kept under control by the body's immune system.

Prevention of thrush and BV

BV is more likely to come back if you smoke and if you have oral sex.

We would recommend that you stop smoking.

Having sex with a condom (which prevents the rise in vaginal pH caused by semen) can also reduce the chances of BV coming back.

Wash with a soap substitute or aqueous cream rather than soap.

Avoid anything that could upset the natural bacterial balance in your vagina, such as:

- Perfumed soaps or shower gels
- Bubble baths or bath products
- Washing your hair in the bath
- Vaginal deodorant or other feminine hygiene products
- Wet wipes on the genital skin
- Scented tampons pads or pant liners
- Performing vaginal douching (cleaning out the vagina)
- Fabric softener or 2 in 1 clothes washing products.

Symptoms of BV

- Fishy or unpleasant odour
- Greyish-white, watery discharge
- Worsening of symptoms after sex or during your period
- Itching, irritation or burning
- Sometimes painful urination.

Treatment of BV

There are products you can buy from a pharmacy to restore the normal vaginal pH and improve symptoms. Using a vaginal probiotic may stop the BV from coming back for longer.

All of these products are topical treatments (they are put inside the vagina) (other products may be available- speak to a pharmacist to find the right product for your symptoms):

- Balance Activ® - Lactic Acid pessaries
- Canesbalance® bacterial vaginosis gel
- Multi Gyn Acijel®
- Canesflor® – Vaginal probiotic.

Symptoms of thrush

- Itch, redness, soreness and cracking at the vaginal entrance
- White, thick, cottage cheese like discharge
- Burning during or after sex
- Sometimes painful urination

You are more likely to get thrush if you:

- Use perfumed soaps and shower gels to wash
- Use scented sanitary towels, liners or tampons
- Have diabetes
- Have recently taken antibiotics.

Treatment of thrush

Products to treat thrush can be bought from the pharmacy (speak to a pharmacist to find the right product for your symptoms). If your symptoms are severe, then re-treat (with the same or different) treatment after 3 days.

- **Fluconazole 150mg** as a single dose – oral tablet

Or

- **Clotrimazole vaginal pessary 500mg** or **vaginal cream 10%** to insert into the vagina with an applicator

Plus

- **Clotrimazole vaginal cream 2%** to apply to the vulva to control itch and soreness.

Need more information?

If you need to contact the Chalmers Centre, our details are:

Chalmers Centre for Sexual Health
2a Chalmers Street
Edinburgh
EH3 9ES

Tel: **0131 536 1070**

