

Vaginal Secretions

Information for patients



You have been given this leaflet as you have described some vaginal secretions that have been present for some time.

Your GP may have already done some investigations and an examination depending on your history to check for:

- Vulvitis: soreness and itch affecting the external genital skin
- Vaginitis: discomfort and or itch inside the vagina
- Abdominal or pelvic pain
- A swab test to exclude sexually transmitted infections: Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia
- A high vaginal swab to exclude Bacterial Vaginosis (BV), Candida (thrush) and Trichomonas Vaginalis
- Your cervical cytology (smear test) is in date and is normal.



If these tests are negative, you probably have what we call a 'physiological discharge' or 'physiological vaginal secretions'. This means you are normal and nothing is wrong.

You may have had treatment for BV or thrush which has not helped.

You may have been asked to change your washing practices to exclude soap, fabric softener and perfumed products in the genital area and to use a soap substitute instead. These changes can help prevent vaginal discharge due to BV, thrush, and dermatitis.

Vaginal secretions are affected by the sex hormones that circulate naturally in the body from puberty onwards. These hormones change the consistency and smell of vaginal secretions during your menstrual cycle.

It is normal for secretions to change from one period until the next. It is also normal for the vaginal secretions to be thicker for a short time before and after your period. It is common for the secretions at this time to be green, brown, or yellow in colour because a small amount of blood is mixed with them. The small amount of blood can also make the secretions smell much stronger at these times.

In the middle of your menstrual cycle, the secretions are usually much thinner, more watery and there can be more of them.

Vaginal secretions are important to keep the vagina healthy and clean. If your vagina didn't have secretions it would fill with 'bad' bacteria and become unhealthy. The secretions remove these 'bad' bacteria by washing them out of the body and supply the 'good' bacteria with nutrients to keep the vagina healthy. These are called 'lactobacilli'.

Vaginal secretions are also needed to lubricate the vagina as without them it would be too painful to have sex. Because of this, vaginal secretions will increase further when a person is aroused.

Increases in secretions

Hormonal contraception can increase vaginal secretions. This is more likely to occur when the hormone oestrogen is used for contraception as in the combined pill. The oestrogen can stimulate the lining of the cervix to grow out onto the outside of the cervix. This is called an ectropion and is harmless.

This lining contains cells which produce secretions. If there is more of this lining then there will be more secretions. This is a normal response to hormones.

If you want to reduce your discharge it may be worth considering another method of contraception. Many people choose to continue with the pill once they understand the increase in secretions does not mean that anything is wrong.

Decreases in secretions

Sometimes hormonal contraception reduces the amount of vaginal secretions a person has. Many people start using the pill soon after they start their periods at puberty to control heavy or painful periods. They may use contraception for many years but when they stop or change method, they may notice an increase in their secretions and think it means that something is wrong. It is often that they are returning to what would be normal for them without hormones.

Improving vaginal health

Many people who are worried about their vaginal secretions will accidentally do things that make the amount of secretions produced increase.

This includes putting products inside the vagina which alter the normal healthy bacteria, for example douching, feminine hygiene wipes, and perfumes that can irritate the skin. This makes the body produce more secretions to try and remove the product that is irritating it. The same thing happens when a person sits in bath water containing bubble baths, soaps, essential oils or shampoo and conditioner after washing hair while in the bath.

You should try to avoid doing these things.

We hope this explains what has been going on.

We are happy to see you at Chalmers sexual health to answer any of your questions, but we want you to know that we are unlikely to offer any further investigations or treatment options than those discussed here.

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

