



Vaginal Thrush

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from Vaginal Thrush. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Useful facts

- **What is Vaginal Thrush?** Thrush is an infection caused by a yeast fungus called *Candida* spp. Small numbers of *Candida* commonly live on the skin around the vaginal area and these are usually harmless.
- **How common is Thrush?** Vaginal thrush isn't classed as an STI (sexually transmitted infection), but it can be triggered by sex, particularly if you have trouble relaxing and your vagina is dry. It can occasionally be passed on to sexual partners. More than half of all women will have at least one bout of thrush in their life and in most cases it develops for no apparent reason.
- **What's causing it?** The immune system and the harmless bacteria that also normally live on the skin and in the vagina usually stop *Candida* from thriving. However, when conditions are good for *Candida* numbers multiply and may invade the vagina and cause symptoms. *Candida* likes warm moist, airless parts of the body. Oral antibiotics can remove the "good" bacteria which allow *Candida* to grow.
- **What are the symptoms?** The discharge from thrush is usually creamy white and quite thick, but is sometimes watery. It can cause itch, redness, discomfort, or pain around the outside of the vagina (the vulva). The discharge from thrush does not usually smell. Some women can have some pain or discomfort whilst having sex or whilst passing urine if they have thrush. Sometimes symptoms are minor and clear up on their own. Often symptoms can be quite irritating and will not go without treatment.
- **How worrying is Thrush?** Thrush does not damage the vagina, and it does not spread to damage the uterus (womb). If you are pregnant, thrush will not harm your baby. Recurrent thrush [4 or more times per year] or a quick recurrence of a new thrush infection can be a sign of undiagnosed or poorly controlled diabetes

What can I expect to happen?

- ✓ **Symptoms** usually clear within a week of starting treatment
- ✓ **Will I need further tests?** You do not usually need a test to diagnose thrush. The diagnosis is often based on the typical symptoms and signs. If the symptoms are not typical or if treatment does not work then the doctor or nurse may take small samples of the discharge with swabs which are then sent to the laboratory.

What can I do myself to get better – now and in the future?

- ✓ **Topical treatments** There are pessaries and creams which you insert into the vagina with an applicator which contain anti-yeast medicines. You can as well as instead rub some anti-thrush cream on to the skin around the vagina for a few days.

Continued overleaf

- ✓ **Avoidance** Avoiding wearing tight fitting clothing, especially clothing made from synthetic materials. Loose fitting, natural fibre underwear may be better. Avoiding using perfumed products around the vaginal area, such as soaps and shower gels, as these may cause further irritation.
- ✓ **Remedies** 'Natural' remedies for thrush include: live yoghurt inserted into the vagina; adding vinegar or bicarbonate of soda to a bath to alter the acidity of the vagina; tampons impregnated with tea tree oil. At present there is little scientific evidence to show that these remedies work but some women may find that they help soothe their symptoms.
- ✓ **Partners** Male sexual partners do not need treatment unless they have symptoms of thrush on their penis. Symptoms in men include redness, itch, and soreness of the foreskin and the head (glans) of the penis. Women do not catch thrush from men who have no symptoms.

When should I seek medical help?

Seek advice from your pharmacist or GP if initial treatment with over the counter preparations doesn't work for you or if any of the following warning symptoms are present:

- **Age** If you are under 16 or over 60 years of age.
- **Occurrence** If you get repeated bouts of thrush
- **Pregnancy** Thrush occurs more commonly in pregnant women, and can be more difficult to clear. It can take several days of topical treatment to clear thrush if you are pregnant.
- **Unwell** If you are unwell in addition to the vaginal and vulval symptoms.
- **Bleeding** You have abnormal vaginal bleeding.
- **Pain** You have lower abdominal pain.
- **Difference** You have symptoms that are not the same as a previous bout of thrush. For example, if the discharge has a bad smell, or if you develop ulcers or blisters next to your vagina.
- **Episodes** You have had two or more episodes of thrush in six months, and have not consulted a doctor or nurse about this for more than a year.
- **Bad reaction** You have had a previous bad reaction to anti-thrush medication.
- **Immune system** You have a weakened immune system - for example, if you are on chemotherapy treatment for cancer or are taking long-term steroid medication for whatever reason.

Where can I find out more?

Remember that your pharmacist can also help you with assessing your symptoms and advise on suitable treatments.



111 is the NHS non-emergency number. It's fast, easy and free. Call 111 and speak to a highly trained adviser, supported by healthcare professionals. They will ask you a series of questions to assess your symptoms and immediately direct you to the best medical care for you.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.