



### What is yeast?

Yeast is normally found in the vagina and gut, along with other helpful bacteria. Too much yeast can cause some discomforts. About 75% of women will have at least one yeast overgrowth in their lifetime. About 45% of women will have two or more, making yeast a common concern for women.

### How can I tell if I have a yeast overgrowth?

You may notice changes like:

- more, thicker or clumpier vaginal discharge (fluid from the vagina) than usual
- itching, dryness, a burning feeling, or discomfort in or around the vagina

### What causes yeast overgrowth?

Often called a yeast infection, yeast overgrowth is just an increase in the normal amount of yeast that occurs naturally. It may be caused by:

- stress
- lack of sleep
- illness
- poor diet or high sugar diet
- medications (like antibiotics, steroids, birth control pills)
- hormone changes (during pregnancy or your menstrual cycle)
- incorrect wiping after using the toilet (the correct way is to wipe from front to back)
- improper underwear (wearing synthetic fabrics, thong styles)
- prolonged wearing of tights, pantyhose & leggings (especially if not cotton)
- wearing tampons for too long (they absorb and can disrupt natural vaginal moisture)
- using tampons more absorbent than needed for current menstrual flow (can cause vaginal dryness and ulcerations)
- frequent use of sanitary pads or liners for vaginal discharge
- repeated douching
- sexual intercourse
- scented products (like toilet paper, sanitary pads, feminine hygiene products & powder)

## **Do men get yeast?**

Yes. Men often have no symptoms, but may notice a rash or itching of the penis or genital area.

## **Do I always need to see a health care provider for yeast overgrowth?**

If you know your body well and have had yeast overgrowth before, you can treat it yourself.

You should be tested if you have never had a vaginal infection or if you still have symptoms one week after treatment. If you are not sure you have a vaginal infection, do not douche or treat it yourself before being examined. This may interfere with the exam or test results.

## **How is testing done?**

A health care provider can do a pelvic exam and take a sample of the discharge. The sample will be sent to a lab but sometimes your health care provider can tell you when you have the exam.

## **What are the treatments for yeast overgrowth?**

### **Over the counter (OTC) treatment:**

Over the counter means you can buy it without a prescription. You can buy anti-yeast creams or ovules (a capsule) at drug or most grocery stores. Some brand names are: *Monistat*, *Canesten* and *Gynecure*.. You can also buy a no-name brand of the cream (clotrimazole or miconazole). Prices vary between brands and stores. We suggest buying the 3-day or 7-day pack so you won't run out. This is less expensive than buying two separate packages.

Another product is called *Probiostat* . You do not need a prescription but it may have to be ordered for you. Ask your health care provider for the order number. You insert one capsule into the vagina at bedtime every night for 10 nights. It is an anti-fungal treatment used to restore normal levels of bacteria in the vagina. It can also be used during antibiotic treatment to prevent yeast overgrowth.

Another product called *CanesOral* is a single-dose treatment. The medication remains active in your body for several days. It may relieve symptoms within 24 hours but it can take a few days for the yeast overgrowth to go away completely.

### **Prescription treatment:**

A health care provider must write a prescription for these types of medicine. Some names are *Gynezole 1* (single dose vaginal cream) and *Terazol* (comes in a cream, ovules or both in a dual pack). It is used for 3 or 7 days.

## **IMPORTANT notes about using anti-yeast or anti-fungal treatments:**

- Be sure to let your health care provider know if you are or think you might be pregnant so you are getting the right treatment.
- Vaginal treatments can break down latex and reduce the effectiveness of condoms or diaphragms.
- If you are taking medication with warfarin (a blood thinner), anti-fungal or anti-yeast medications can cause more bruising and abnormal bleeding. Check with your health care provider before using them.

## **Home treatment:**

**Yogurt/Lactobacillus:** You can try one of the following:

- Insert plain yogurt into the vagina at bedtime for 3-4 nights. Dip a tampon into the yogurt and insert into the vagina.
- Insert 1-2 lactobacillus yogurt capsules into the vagina at bedtime for 7 nights. You can buy these at a health food store. Store them in the fridge.
- Insert an acidophilus tablet high in the vagina and another tablet near the vaginal entrance at bedtime. Some women take these orally. Check the details with your health food store.
- Eat 1 carton of live yogurt and lactobacillus or take 1 tsp. of lactobacillus acidophilus in a glass of water 3 times a day with 1 tsp. of bifidobacteria.

Health food stores can provide more information if you are interested in these methods. They also have special yogurts with higher levels of bacterial cultures.

If you have a mild yeast overgrowth, don't use a lot of lactobacillus. Try vinegar douches first or alternate using lactobacillus tablets one day with a vinegar douche the next day. Too much lactobacillus can cause an itchy discharge.

## **Douches/Herbal remedies:**

NOTE: If you are being treated for any medical conditions, talk to your health care provider before using herbals to ensure there are no interactions or other problems.

If you are not pregnant, you can douche 1-2 times a day until you feel better. Douching options include:

- Mix 2 TB white vinegar or lemon juice in 4 cups warm water. Gently pour into the vagina.
- Soak a handful of juniper berries in water overnight. Add to 4 cups boiling water and boil for 30 minutes. Let cool, strain and douche.
- Simmer 1 TB of goldenseal and myrrh in 3 cups of water for 5 minutes. Let cool, strain and douche once a week.
- Aromatherapy: add essential oil of teat tree and myrrh to a warm bath.

- Add 2 drops of tea tree oil to the top of a damp tampon. Insert into the vagina and leave it for 3 hours.

Tea tree oil has antibacterial and anti-fungal (anti-yeast) properties. It may also irritate skin tissues. Stop using it if it causes or makes irritation worse.

NOTE: Whatever you treatments decide to use, learn how to use them correctly and be aware of possible side effects

### **How can I reduce the discomforts of yeast overgrowth?**

- Avoid over cleaning the vaginal area.
- If you have pain during sexual intercourse, wait until things are back to normal or use a water-soluble lubricant.
- To relieve a swollen or painful vaginal area, sit in cool water or use tea tree oil (see douches/herbal remedies above).
- To relieve itching, bathe the vagina in a chickweed infusion. Pour 1 cup boiling water over 2 tsps. chickweed. Steep for 5 minutes and allow to cool before using.

### **How can I prevent yeast overgrowth?**

- Garlic is an effective natural antifungal. Eats lots of fresh garlic or take three garlic capsules three times daily.
- Add acidophilus into your diet on a regular basis. It is available in tablet or powder form or you can eat 8 ounces of yogurt with lactobacillus acidophilus every day.
- Keep the genital area clean and dry. Avoid over cleaning.
- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet.
- Do not use scented soaps, bath products, vaginal sprays or douches.
- Change tampons or pads often. Use tampons made for the flow you have on the different days of your period. Tampons can absorb too much or disrupt the natural balance of vaginal fluids. Try alternating tampons with pads.
- Wear 100% cotton underwear and loose fitting pants. Thong underwear may also contribute to yeast overgrowth.
- Change out of wet bathing suits or damp exercise clothes as soon as possible.
- If you have diabetes, try to control your sugar levels.
- A healthy lifestyle can boost your immune system:
  - Learn to deal with stress in positive ways
  - Get enough sleep
  - Aim for 20-30 minutes of aerobic exercise four times each week
  - Try relaxation exercises like yoga, deep breathing or meditation
  - Eat well

### **RECURRENT YEAST OVERGROWTH**

About 5% of women have a condition called recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis (RVVC). This means they have four or more yeast infections within one year. These women should see a health care provider for treatment with a prescription anti-fungal cream or oral tablets.

### **To reduce recurrences:**

You can use *Probiostat* (see OTC treatments above) You do not need a prescription but it may have to be ordered for you. Ask your health care provider for the order number.

You insert one capsule into the vagina at bedtime every night for 10 nights. It is an anti-fungal treatment used to restore normal levels of bacteria in the vagina.

### **A note about using herbal remedies for recurrences:**

Some natural remedies may prevent recurring yeast overgrowth. Consult a health care provider who knows about herbals and other natural remedies or a licensed naturopath before using them. This is especially important if you are pregnant.

### **Want more information?**

- Call HealthLinks at 788-8200
- Visit these websites:
  - [www.cwhn.ca](http://www.cwhn.ca)
  - [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)
  - [www.4woman.org](http://www.4woman.org)

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