



The vagina is the canal that connects the cervix (inside the body) with the vulva (outside the vagina). Each vagina is unique. It has its own smell and amount of normal discharge. The vagina has varying amounts of yeast, bacteria, and acidity levels throughout the menstrual cycle. It usually keeps them in healthy balance on its own.

Is my discharge normal?

You may notice discharge on your underwear. It may be white, pale, yellow, or clear. The smell may be distinct but not unpleasant. Pay attention to what discharge is normal for you so you can tell when something changes or when you may need to see a healthcare provider.

Do I need to douche?

No. A douche forces water or other solutions into the vagina to rinse away menstrual blood and vaginal fluids. Douching is not necessary or recommended. It can upset the vagina's natural balance and increase risk of irritation.

Your vagina is a self-cleaning organ. It makes its own fluids to clean and protect itself. The safest and best way to clean your vagina is to let it clean itself.

IMPORTANT: Douching after sex does not prevent pregnancy or protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs.) It may push sperm even further into your vagina.

How can I keep my vulva and vagina healthy?

- » Use soft, white, unscented toilet paper. Always wipe front to back.
- » Use cotton, unscented pads and tampons or use a menstrual cup.
- » Avoid scented shampoo, soaps, bubble baths, menstrual products, and perfumed powders or creams.
- » Have lukewarm or cool showers instead of hot baths when possible.
- » Shaving and waxing aren't necessary. They can cause irritation and make some infections (like genital warts) worse.
- » Wear cotton underwear. Choose pantyhose or tights with cotton gussets.
- » Change out of wet bathing suits and exercise clothes as soon as possible.
- » Avoid using panty liners when you don't have your period.
- » Wash your underwear with unscented detergent without fabric softener.
- » Allow time for sexual foreplay so your vagina can lubricate itself. Use water-based lubricants during sex and with sex toys.
- » Pee after sex and rinse your vulva with cool water.
- » Activities that put direct pressure on the vulva (like cycling or horseback riding) can cause irritation.
- » Highly chlorinated pools, hot tubs, and saunas can cause irritation.

What else can affect vaginal health?

Antibiotic use, stress, illness, and hormone changes can also upset the vagina's natural balance and make it more vulnerable to irritation. STIs, yeast overgrowth, and other common infections can irritate the vagina.

To reduce your risk for STIs, use barrier methods like condoms and sex dams every time you have sex and get tested for STIs often. Remember non-barrier birth control methods (like the pill, diaphragms, and IUDs) do not protect against STIs.

When should I see a healthcare provider about my vaginal health?

See a healthcare provider if you have any of the following:

- » itching, irritation or soreness
- » burning feeling when you pee
- » increased or unusual discharge
- » swelling of the labia (lips of vagina)
- » unexpected bleeding
- » painful sex
- » unpleasant or strong odor
- » abdominal pain
- » bumps or sores

Don't try to diagnose yourself. Some of these may be signs of conditions that may require treatment.

How can I ease discomfort?

- » Protect dry and fragile skin with Vaseline®, Glaxxo Base®, Barriere® or Penaten® creams. IMPORTANT: Do not use these oil-based lubricants during sex.
- » Relieve burning or irritation with lukewarm or cool sitz baths (or sea-salt soaks).
- » Apply cold clothes or ice packs to your vulva to relieve burning.
- » Some people find that avoiding certain foods helps to ease discomforts. Keep track of any foods that affect you and avoid them as necessary.

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