



What is bacterial vaginosis (BV)?

Bacterial vaginosis is an imbalance of bacteria in the vagina. It is due to an overgrowth of certain types of bacteria that can cause problems.

Who can get BV?

Any person with a vagina can get bacterial vaginosis. BV is not a sexually transmitted infection. It cannot be passed to sexual partner who has a penis. There is some evidence that it can be passed through sexual contact between partners with vaginas.

How can I reduce the chance of getting BV?

It is not known what causes the bacterial imbalance in the vagina. Certain things make it less likely. These things may help lower your risk for BV:

- » use condoms and/or sex dams with sex partners and sex toys
- » reduce or avoid smoking
- » avoid douching

BV is more common in people who are sexually active but people who are not sexually active can also get it.

What are the symptoms of BV?

The most common sign is smelly vaginal discharge which people often describe as smelling fishy. This smell may be worse after having sex with a male partner. The discharge may look grayish white or yellow. Some people complain of a burning feeling in their vagina as well.

Many things can cause abnormal vaginal discharge, including some sexually transmitted infections (STIs). See your healthcare provider to be tested and treated if you are concerned about symptoms.

How can I tell if I have BV?

See a healthcare provider. They will ask about your symptoms, do a pelvic exam, and take a sample of the vaginal discharge. They may be able to tell you when you have the exam. They may need to send a test to the lab to be sure whether you have the infection or not.

How is BV treated?

Treatment is not always needed. You don't need treatment if you:

- » have no symptoms
- » are not pregnant
- » are not having gynecological surgery (ex: abortion)

There are probiotic treatments you can use. However, there are no studies to confirm that these are helpful. Check with a healthcare provider.

Healthcare providers usually prescribe an antibiotic to treat bacterial vaginosis. They can be pills you swallow or a cream or capsules (called ovules) to put in your vagina. If you are pregnant, you will need to take pills.

Bacterial vaginosis usually clears up in 2 or 3 days with antibiotics, but treatment lasts for 7 days. Do not stop using your medicine just because your symptoms go away. Be sure to take all the antibiotics.

Antibiotics usually work well and have few side effects. Sometimes they can lead to a vaginal yeast overgrowth. A yeast overgrowth can cause itching, redness, and a lumpy, white discharge. If you have these symptoms, talk to your healthcare provider about what to do.

For 1 in 5 people, bacterial vaginosis comes back within a month after finishing treatment. You may need to have another antibiotic treatment.

Can BV cause other problems?

Bacterial vaginosis usually does not cause other health problems. In some cases, it can lead to problems like increased risk of:

- » miscarriage, early (preterm) delivery for pregnant people
- » uterine infection after pregnancy
- » Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), after an abortion
- » getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI) if you are exposed to one

Want more information?

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/bacterial-vaginosis-by>

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Adapted from: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/hw53097>