Yeast Infections (Genital/Vulvovaginal Candidiasis)
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Definition
A yeast infection, also called candidiasis, occurs when there is an imbalance and overgrowth of the yeast called Candida. Yeast is normally found on the body and in the vagina in small amounts, but when it overgrows symptoms can develop. Rarely, yeast infections can be passed through sexual contact.

In women, vaginal yeast infections are very common. Men can also get yeast infections on the skin (e.g. jock itch and balanitis).

Causes
A yeast infection is caused by an overgrowth of yeast (Candida) that normally lives in the mouth, vagina and the rectum. About 90% of cases are caused by *Candida albicans.* You can get a yeast infection without having sex.

Often there is no clear reason why a yeast infection develops. However, the following conditions can increase the possibility that one might occur:

- Use of certain medications such as antibiotics, corticosteroids and hormonal birth control
- Pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Compromised (very weak) immune system

Signs and Symptoms
Women with a vaginal yeast infection may have:

- Thick, white, "cottage cheese-like" vaginal discharge
- Vaginal itching or burning
- Vulvar redness, itching, or burning
- Pain with sex
- Burning with urination

Men can get a yeast infection on the skin. It is commonly found on the groin, scrotum, or head of the penis. Men may notice a red rash that is itchy.

Diagnosis and Tests
Symptoms of a yeast infection in the genital area can be similar to other infections, especially some sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you have never had a yeast infection before or are unsure, it is important to see your health care provider or go to a sexual health clinic.

In women, a doctor or nurse can collect a swab of the discharge to diagnose the infection. In men, the infection can usually be diagnosed with a physical exam.

Complications
Yeast infections can be uncomfortable but are usually not dangerous. They can recur with or without treatment. If you are having frequent yeast infections you should see your health care provider. Some infections are caused by other species of Candida that are not susceptible to over-the-counter antifungal treatments.
Treatment

Vaginal yeast infections can be treated with anti-fungal creams or suppositories that are inserted in the vagina. There is also a single-dose oral medication. Both types of treatments are available at the pharmacy without a prescription. If symptoms do not go away or become worse after treatment, you should see your health care provider.

Yeast infections on the skin are usually treated by applying an antifungal cream on the rash for several days.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, talk to your health care provider before taking any medication.

Prevention/Self-care Tips

It is important for women to keep their vagina healthy. Your vagina cleans itself. You do not need to douche, use feminine sprays or use soap inside the vagina. Uncircumcised men should gently retract their foreskin and clean the area with warm water. Before the foreskin is pulled back over the penis the area should be gently dried. For men and women:

- Wear cotton underwear (men may prefer loose underwear such as boxers)
- Avoid tight pants and synthetic underwear because they may hold moisture around the genitals
- Speak to your health care provider if you believe that a medication such as hormonal contraception is causing your yeast infection
- If you have diabetes, maintain stable blood sugar levels as much as possible
- Finally, some research has shown that oral or vaginal probiotics may help prevent yeast infections

Information for Sexual Partners

For men and women diagnosed with a yeast infection, routine screening and treatment of sexual partners is not needed. Treatment is only needed if your sexual partner has symptoms or could be considered if you are having recurrent yeast infections.

For more information
call the AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine at 416-392-2437

SAFER SEX

To reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), use a condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex