

These are problems that occur in the vagina (a part of the female reproductive system connected to the cervix).

What to look for

- your vulva is swollen and itchy.
- you have white areas on your vulva.
- there is more vaginal discharge than normal, it smells, burns or itches.
- abnormal bleeding.

The vagina is like a channel which connects the cervix to the outside area called the vulva. It generates mucus and secretions automatically. It does not need our help to clean it, the secretions flow down along with other dead cells and substances. Discharge is normal and occurs in most women. It is usually clear or white in colour.

Common problems which occur in the vagina region are yeast infections, vaginitis (inflammation), bacterial vaginosis, sexually transmitted diseases, abnormal discharge and vaginal infections.

Bacterial vaginosis commonly occurs in the reproductive years. There may be a fishy-smelling discharge, but there may be no symptoms at all. Ask your doctor to investigate this possibility during your pap smear. Yeast infections produce cottage-cheese-like discharge. They are very common and most women have or will experience them during their lifetime.

Vaginal infections are not serious usually; sexually transmitted infections such as Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia have been found to be associated with other complications.

Vaginal cancer, can be very serious and can spread to other areas. See our entry on Cancer.

Causes

Stress may cause a change in the vaginal bacteria which can create vaginitis.

Vaginal yeast infections are caused by the Candida fungus. The use of antibiotics can make this infection occur.

Traditional Treatment

Conventional treatment is a must in diagnosing possible vaginal problems.

You will need to be examined and your doctor may prescribe the appropriate medications and/or antibiotics to treat the ailments.

Lifestyle

You may need to avoid using tampons while you have vaginal problems as this can exacerbate the condition. Also avoid sexual intercourse while you have vaginitis or yeast infections.

Dietary Considerations

Natural acidophilus yogurt is brilliant for ridding the vagina of yeast infections. You can also apply it directly to the area and insert it into the vagina for relief.

Always wipe from front to back to avoid spreading infection.

Prevention

A good diet, plenty of filtered water, good hygiene and adequate protection during intercourse will help your system avoid getting vaginitis.

When to seek further professional advice

- you have excessive bleeding not at the time of your period or abnormal sharp pain along with fever.