

Helping Hand™

Vaginal Discharge

As you grow up, you may notice a discharge from your vagina during the time between your menstrual periods. It is normal for all women to have some vaginal discharge. The amount, color and thickness of this discharge are different for each woman.

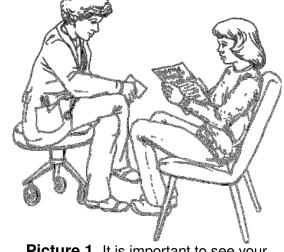
Normal vaginal discharge is thin like mucus. It is clear, white or slightly yellow in color. It usually has no unpleasant odor and is not itchy or irritating to the skin. The amount of

discharge may relate to your menstrual cycle. It usually increases 2 weeks before menstruation. Some birth control methods may also change or increase the amount of discharge. Also, after intercourse, a musky odor may be noticed. This odor could be caused by the natural cleansing of sperm from the vagina. But if the odor lasts more than a day, it may mean an infection is present.

Signs of Infection

A vaginal discharge alone does not mean there is an infection. But if you are also having any of these other signs or you have unprotected sex (sex without a condom), you should see your doctor or nurse practitioner:

- Vaginal itching, burning or irritation
- Painful intercourse
- Thick, white vaginal discharge
- Painful urination



Picture 1 It is important to see your doctor or nurse practitioner to find out what type of treatment is needed.

- Unpleasant odor that lasts more than a day
- Pain or tenderness in your lower abdomen
- Blisters, bumps or sores in your genital area
- A change from the type of vaginal discharge you usually have.

Treatment

Different types of vaginal infections need different kinds of treatment. Some vaginal infections require a specific antibacterial medicine, available only by prescription. Others are not as serious as sexually transmitted infections but need to be treated anyway. This is why it is important to see your doctor or nurse practitioner to know what type of treatment is needed. All women who are sexually active need to see their doctor or nurse practitioner regularly.

How to Prevent Vaginal Infections

Even if you are careful, vaginal infections can occur. You can reduce your chance of infection by following the guidelines listed below.

Cleanliness and Personal Hygiene

- Take a shower or bath regularly using a plain, mild soap. Do not use bubble bath.
- Do not use scented feminine hygiene products such as vaginal sprays, scented powders, deodorant tampons, scented pads and panty liners.
- Do not use a douche unless instructed by your doctor or nurse. These products do not prevent or treat infections. Instead, they change the natural state of the vagina, making irritation or infection more likely.
- Use plain white toilet tissue.
- After using the bathroom, always wipe from front to back.
- Wash and dry your hands before touching the vaginal area.
- After intercourse, try to urinate to help prevent a urinary tract infection.
- Using condoms during intercourse can also help prevent sexually transmitted infections.

Tampons and Sanitary Napkins

Change tampons and sanitary napkins often, at least every 2 to 3 hours. Remove the tampon before going to bed and wear a pad instead.

Douching

Do not douche. It does not keep your body clean and it may cause or worsen vaginal infections.

Clothing

Wear cotton underpants or cotton-lined underwear. Cotton absorbs moisture better and is less irritating than synthetics.

- Avoid tight-fitting leggings or tights.
- Avoid sitting around in damp or sweaty clothing.
- Try to avoid wearing tight slacks and jeans that do not let air circulate.

If You Have a Vaginal Infection

- 1. Take **all** the medicine for as long as prescribed. If you stop taking the antibiotic before the infection is completely cured, the infection may return.
- 2. If the doctor prescribes a vaginal cream, **do not** use tampons while you are using the cream because the tampons will absorb the cream.

If You Have a Vaginal Infection, continued

- 3. Do not have intercourse until your treatment is over and you have no more signs of infection.
- 4. If your doctor says the infection can be spread through intercourse, tell your partner. This is very important because your partner may also need treatment.

W	hen to Call Your Doctor
	all your doctor (phone) or Adolescent Health at (614) 722-2450 any of the following occurs:
•	If you have finished your medicine and you still have symptoms of vaginal infection.
•	If you have a fever.
•	If you have any pain.
•	If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse or call