



Education

Bacterial Vaginosis

What is bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a common inflammation of the vagina caused by bacteria.

How does it occur?

Bacterial vaginosis appears to be caused by an overgrowth of several types of bacteria. It is normal to have these bacteria in the vagina. However, too many of them in the vagina can cause unpleasant symptoms.

It is not known what causes the overgrowth of bacteria. Most cases of BV occur in sexually active women. Women who have more than one sexual partner have a greater risk of developing the problem. However, women who are not sexually active can also have BV.

Douching or using an IUD for birth control may increase your risk.

What are the symptoms?

Many women do not have any symptoms. When they do, the most common symptom is a discharge from the vagina. The discharge may be gray or yellowish. It often has a fishy odor. You may also have itching around the opening of the vagina.

The bacteria associated with BV are sometimes found in the tips of men's penises. However, men do not usually have any symptoms.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will give you a pelvic exam and get a sample of vaginal discharge. The discharge will be examined in the lab.

How is it treated?

Your health care provider may prescribe a medicine called Flagyl that you take by mouth. Or your provider may prescribe a medicine for you to put into your vagina. If there is a possibility that you may be pregnant, tell your health care provider. Do NOT take Flagyl. Flagyl should not be used during the first 3 months of pregnancy. It can be used AFTER the first 3 months of pregnancy if it is clearly needed.

How long will the effects last?

Bacterial vaginosis needs to be treated because it increases your risk of becoming infected with HIV if you are exposed to the virus. In addition, if you also have a sexually transmitted infection, such as chlamydia, the risk that the infection will spread into the uterus is higher when you have BV.

The symptoms usually go away within a few days after you start treatment.

How can I take care of myself?

If you are taking Flagyl, do not drink any alcohol until 2 days after you finish the medicine. Drinking alcohol while you are taking Flagyl may cause severe nausea and vomiting.

If you have sexual intercourse while you are taking the medicine, make sure you use a latex or polyurethane condom so you do not become reinfected.

Call your health care provider during office hours if:

- Your symptoms get worse or last more than 1 week. Return to your health care provider's office to determine whether you need additional treatment.
- You have other questions or concerns.

How can I help prevent bacterial vaginosis?

BV is not completely understood by scientists, and the best ways to prevent it are not known. However, your chances of having BV are greater when you have a new sex partner or more than one partner. It is seldom found in women who have never had intercourse.

To help reduce the risk of upsetting the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina and developing BV:

- Do not have sexual intercourse. If you do, have just one partner who has no other partners.
- Do not douche.

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