

VAGINITIS

Is vaginal discharge normal?

Normally the vagina contains a balance of several kinds of bacteria. “Good” bacteria help keep the vagina slightly acid. This, in turn, keeps harmful bacteria from growing too quickly. Normal secretions are either thick and whitish, or slippery and clear, depending on the stage of the menstrual cycle. Healthy discharge has little odor. Normally the amount of discharge increases during sexual excitement, ovulation, breast feeding, and just before your period. It is normal to have a discharge on a daily basis, which changes slightly throughout the month and is present on your panties or panty liner.

What is an abnormal discharge like?

When the balance of the vagina is upset, harmful bacteria grow too quickly and cause infections. An abnormal discharge may include one or more of the following:

- ◆ Itching and/or burning of the vulva (the inner or outer lips of your genital area)
- ◆ Unpleasant odors
- ◆ Bleeding or bloody discoloration
- ◆ Changes in color, quantity, or texture of vaginal discharge, other than your regular, expected changes associated with your cycle.

What upsets the normal balance of the vagina?

Harmful bacteria and other germs can be spread through sex. Other things that can upset the balance of the vagina include:

- ◆ birth control pills
- ◆ pregnancy
- ◆ damp underwear
- ◆ poor diet (not enough veggies)
- ◆ perfumed soaps
- ◆ spermicides
- ◆ forgetting to remove tampons, toilet tissue, or contraceptive devices from the vagina
- ◆ change in psychological stress level
- ◆ having intercourse without a condom
- ◆ antibiotics
- ◆ douching
- ◆ tight pants
- ◆ feminine hygiene sprays
- ◆ hot tubs, swimming pool water
- ◆ perfumed toilet paper

What should I do if I think I have vaginitis?

If you have symptoms of an abnormal discharge, you need to see your health care provider for a diagnosis. To help your provider find out what you have: Schedule your exam when you’re not on your period. Don’t put anything in your vagina for 24 hours before your exam.

How can I stay healthy?

- ◆ Wash your external vaginal area every day. Use mild soap .to external genital areas only. Do not use fragrant, scented, or antibacterial soaps on this area. Rinse well. Pat dry.
 - ◆ Always wipe toward the back and away from the vagina after bowel movements.
 - ◆ Take antibiotics only when needed. Antibiotics can kill “good” bacteria in the vagina.
 - ◆ Avoid douching, perfumed soaps, detergents, bubble baths, powder, and vaginal sprays. Do not use deodorized sanitary pads or tampons.
 - ◆ Wear cotton or cotton-lined underpants.
 - ◆ Limit the number of sex partners. Use a condom every time that you have sex.
 - ◆ Inspect your partner’s penis for sores or discharges.
 - ◆ Do not have intercourse if you think you or your partner has an infection
- .Maintain your body’s natural resistance to vaginitis by eating, sleeping, exercising, and coping with stress as well as possible.