

Yeast

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This is a general, informational, self help guide to yeast infections. It is not intended to replace personalized, individually considered healthcare. If you have any doubts as to what your problems are due to, or have continuing problems after trying a remedy, then I would encourage you to seek health care from a trained professional.

Yeast. Such a common problem for women. We call it a yeast *infection*, but that is a misnomer. What is really happening is an overgrowth of yeast in the vagina. Yeast commonly exists, in small amounts in our vaginas, it is kept in check by, among other things, the healthy lactobacilli which also live there. So when we have “yeast” what we have is an overgrowth of this one element: Candida. So when we have “yeast” what we have is really an imbalance, not an infection.

Amazingly some women never get one yeast infection in their life. Amazing. But most of us experience this at least a few times over the years. Sometimes a woman can get into what I call “yeast sensitive times” where recurrent imbalance is common. Others still will have long term yeast challenges that feel, and in fact may be, unrelenting.

Candida albicans is by far the most common species of candida that we see. However, other stains occasionally do occur. There are Candida tropicalis and Candida glabrata, among others. This is important to remember when we look at treatment options and effectiveness.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of yeast overgrowth are itching and burning. At the onset of yeast overgrowth the itching can be mildly irritating, but it can progress to significant intensity, to the point of waking one at night and scratching to the point of drawing blood. Excess yeast makes the elasticity of the skin diminished, so tearing is common. The burning can be pronounced, particularly after intercourse, where the vagina can feel raw and throbbing. While itching and irritation can be inside it is more commonly felt externally at the vaginal opening or over the labia (lips) or around the anus.

Vaginal discharge is variable. There is a classic “cottage cheese” type discharge which can be very heavy and smell “yeasty” like bread yeast. However, it is not uncommon to have no significant change in one’s discharge.

Treatments

Here is where the three strains come into play. All the over the counter (OTC) pharmaceutical treatments and the oral prescription treatment are effective

ONLY on *Candida albicans*. Now this is the most common form that we see, so usually this is not a problem. But if you try one of these treatments and it doesn't work, what you have is either one of the other strains of candida or a resistant strain. The prescription cream will treat three common strains. At times I have seen treatment resistance to all but the boric acid treatment (see below).

Over the counter products

In the pharmacy you can find all kinds of creams and suppositories to treat yeast. I am partial to the 3 day creams (monostat, gynelotrimin or other similar products) I find the cream disperses better than the suppositories.

I have not seem great response from the homeopathic vaginal formulations—homeopathy is very individualized, so a standard homeopathic product is not ideal.

Be wary of anti-itch creams that are not anti-fungal (yes, yeast is a fungus). Some are acidifiers, which may help but not always cure.

Non prescription approaches

Boric acid: This is the most reliable cure that I have found. You need to purchase Boric Acid powder (this is a VERY weak acid and does not burn) this can be hard to find. Locally Meadowcreek Pharmacy carries it, and the large gel caps you need to purchase as well. When you buy this, you will notice the skull and cross bones on it. This is because you DO NOT want to EAT it. Rather you will fill the gel caps and place one a night in your vagina for 7 days—usually this will effect a full cure.

Active culture yogurt: eating this will help prevent getting yeast and can treat a very mild case. Inserting it vaginally can treat yeast. To accomplish this buy plain active culture yogurt and a turkey baster. At night, right before bed, draw up yogurt into the baster insert the baster into your vagina and GENTLY squeeze out the yogurt. You probably will want to wear a pad. Repeat nightly for one week. If you are pregnant you have to be VERY careful as you do not want to push any air or yogurt into the cervix. If you have any level of concern about your ability to safely do this DO NOT DO IT. Rather visit a healthcare provider and seek care.

Tea tree oil: This is effective but hard to get into the vagina and it will burn if the irritation is significant. Also, it can be costly. For a mild imbalance you can put some on your finger and try and spread it inside. You can also soak a tampon in the oil and then insert it.

Dietary Impacts

If you are having problems wit recurrences of yeast infections you might want to

look at how you might be feeding your yeast. Yeasts like sugar. For some women any sugar intake triggers a vaginal yeast infection. For all women cutting out sugar is helpful at yeasty times. So simple sugars, chocolate (sorry) and alcohol are included in this list. Again, sorry.

Soaps, Douches, Pads and Tampons

The vagina is a self cleaning orifice. It not only does not need soap to clean it, but the delicate balance of the natural flora of the vagina is altered by soaps and douching. Soap is great externally—in the area where there is hair and around the anus, **NOT** inside the labia where there is no naturally occurring hair or inside the vagina. Soap more often than not leads to both yeast infections and bacterial vaginosis (see article on bacterial vaginosis for more details on this) rather than curing them. If you are having on-going problems with yeast consider your body wash or soap. Be aware that when soaping your body some might be getting inside your vaginal area causing recurrences. If you shave your pubic hair be aware of the shaving cream and be careful. Or better yet, just let it grow (the hair I mean).

Douches on very rare occasions can be warranted—as a last resort. Vinegar douches will relieve yeast symptoms in the short term, but at the cost of altering the natural balance. So avoid unless advised by a practitioner.

There is no place in women's healthcare for scented douches/tampons or pads. If you are struggling with yeast recurrences I would encourage you to use organic tampons, non scented –ideally organic pads, a deva cup or Instead soft cup.

The Moisture Issue

Yeast is a fungus and as such requires moisture to live. After you shower and towel dry, consider how moist your groin is. Probably it's fairly damp. Yeast exists abundantly in the environment just looking for a nice warm moist place to live. So don't help it inhabit your body. I encourage using a hair dryer to fully dry externally around your pubic hair and anal area. Also for larger women be careful of the skin under your breasts and in any abdominal skin fold. Keep them dry. In the heat of the summer I often see women and men with yeast in these areas. It appears as a red shinny rash with a darker red line on the outside margin. This can effectively be treated with an OTC "jock itch" antifungal. Jock itch is simply the male version of yeast. Lotrimin, Tinactin and Lamisil are trade names. These are too strong to be used on the tender vaginal tissues.

In the summer try not to stay too long in wet bathing suits or sweaty underpants.

