

Vaginal Thrush

Vaginal thrush is a very common condition that most women will experience at least once. It is a yeast infection that causes **itching, irritation** when urinating and swelling of the vagina and surrounding area, and can sometimes cause a watery or white cottage-cheese like discharge. In more severe cases, the skin around the vagina can become **swollen, dry** and can crack and become very sore.

Thrush can affect women of any age or skin type, but it is more common during times of hormonal imbalance, like pregnancy, menstruation and menopause. It is thought that around **5% of women** will experience recurrent or “complicated” thrush – that is, they will experience thrush **4 or more times in a year**.

Symptoms of Vaginal Thrush

Thrush is usually caused by a yeast-type fungus called Candida albicans. Many women have Candida in their vagina all the time and don't experience any symptoms. It is only when something alters that natural balance of the skin that symptoms arise. For example:

- Hormone fluctuations – menstruation, pregnancy, menopause
- Taking antibiotics for a non-related condition. (Antibiotics can kill off friendly bacteria as well as unwanted bacteria, and this impairs the body's ability to maintain balanced skin)
- Underlying health problems, such as diabetes or a weakened immune system
- Using harsh chemicals in the intimate area, such as harsh soaps or shower gels
- Fragranced sanitary products such as tampons or liners
- Wearing tight clothing or synthetic material next to the skin, particularly in humid conditions

Douching, or washing too frequently can upset the balance of the vagina

Thrush is not a sexually transmitted disease (STI), but it can be passed on to a sexual partner, so care should be taken during a flare up.

Treatment for “uncomplicated” vaginal thrush can include antifungal creams, pessaries that can be inserted into the vagina, or tablets to be taken orally.

Thrush On Other Areas Of The Body

It is not uncommon for men to experience thrush on their penis, causing similar symptoms to vaginal thrush. Itchy, sore, red and swollen skin around the intimate area, and sometimes discharge from the penis.

Men, women and babies can also experience thrush in the mouth. Oral thrush is not contagious, and is usually easily treated. Again is it usually caused by yeast, and occurs when there is an imbalance in the mouths environment.

Oral thrush can cause a loss or alteration of taste, redness and pain of the mouth and throat, cracks at the corner of the mouth, and white patches or “plaques” inside the mouth that can be wiped off.

Triggers of Oral Thrush

Taking antibiotics, which can cause friendly bacteria to die off and allow fungus or unwanted bacteria to take over.

- Using inhalers or puffers for asthma or lung conditions
- Wearing false teeth, dentures, a plate or dental implants, particularly if they don't fit well
- Underlying health conditions or taking medications which may cause dry mouth (Xerostomia)
- Smoking
- A weakened immune system



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