

## The Normal Vagina

The vagina, which is three to five inches long in a non-aroused state, is a muscular tube with a 45 degree angle toward the small of the back. Within the lining of the vagina are glands that secrete small amounts of mucus to keep the vagina moist and clean. Women may normally have a discharge that is clear, odorless, and varies in quantity and consistency throughout the menstrual cycle.

The vagina naturally contains a delicate balance of bacteria, yeast, hormones, glycogen, and natural secretions. These all work to maintain the vagina's normal acidic (pH) environment. A normal pH level for the vagina is between 3.8 and 4.2. Certain factors such as illness and specific medications, can disrupt the chemical balance of the vagina causing the pH to rise, making the vagina less acidic than normal. This may prompt a vaginal infection.

A discharge that is a different texture or consistency than normal is often the first sign of a vaginal infection. Redness, swelling, and itching can indicate a vaginal infection.

## What are the types of vaginal infections?

Bacterial vaginosis, trichomoniasis, and candidiasis (yeast infection) are the most common vaginal infections. The chart below provides a brief overview of each infection. For a detailed description of each of these infections, please refer to

other ECU Student Health Service brochures. Because the symptoms of these three vaginal infections can be difficult to distinguish, women experiencing any of the symptoms below should avoid self diagnosis (particularly if this is the first time experiencing symptoms). An accurate diagnosis by a health care provider ensures proper diagnosis and treatment.

	<b>Cause</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>	<b>Diagnosis &amp; Treatment</b>
<b>Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)</b>	If the normal pH is thrown out of balance, certain bacteria may overgrow in the vagina causing an infection. Specific causes may include oral contraceptive use, menstruation, multiple sex partners and sexual intercourse.	Many women are without symptoms. There is an increase in discharge that has a "fishy" odor, particularly after intercourse. The discharge may have a flour-paste appearance. Most men have no symptoms. When present, they may include a reddened foreskin and slight discharge.	BV must be diagnosed by a health care provider by microscopic examination of discharge. The infection is treated with an antibiotic. Sex partners should seek medical advice.
<b>Trichomoniasis (Trich)</b>	The most common cause is sexual transmission of the organism which causes the infection. Non sexual transmission has occurred in hot tubs and other moist areas.	Many women do not have symptoms. Symptoms may include a heavy yellow-green discharge that has a foul odor, itching, burning and redness around the genitalia. Up to 40% of male sexual partners may harbor the disease causing agent and most men have no symptoms.	The woman and her sex partner(s) should seek diagnosis and treatment. Diagnosis is made based on the microscopic examination of the discharge. Antibiotics such as Flagyl are recommended for treatment.
<b>Yeast Infection</b>	An overgrowth of an organism called Candida albicans can be caused by pregnancy, birth control pills, diabetes, oral antibiotics, high sugar diet, and tight fitting jeans or nylon undergarments. Yeast infection is rarely transmitted sexually.	About 30% of women show no symptoms. Symptoms may include genital redness and itching, thick cottage-cheese-like discharge, and pain during intercourse. Most men show no symptoms but may have itching and redness of the penis, and pain and burning during urination.	Once a diagnosis is made by microscopic examination of discharge, many treatments are available in different forms such as pills, creams and suppositories. Antibiotics do not work since yeast are not bacterial. Sexual partners may need to be treated if infections recur.

## Specific Tips About Treating Vaginal Infections

- ◆ Use the medicine exactly as the instructions describe. Do not stop using the medicine after a few days even if symptoms have cleared. Complete the entire course of treatment even if a menstrual period occurs.
- ◆ Do not douche unless your health care provider recommends it.
- ◆ Avoid products such as feminine hygiene sprays, bubble baths, powder, and deodorant soaps. For some women, these product may irritate vaginal tissue.
- ◆ Many of the organisms that cause vaginal infections thrive in a moist environment. Avoid steam rooms, hot tubs, and extended time in wet bathing suits or sweaty gym clothes. Gently dry the vaginal after bathing. If you are experiencing an infection, dry the vaginal area using a hair dryer on a cool setting rather than rubbing the area with a dry towel.
- ◆ Avoid clothing that traps heat and moisture in the external vaginal area (i.e., nylon panties, girdles, panty hose, tight pants, leotards, and tights). Purchase underwear made of cotton.
- ◆ Avoid intercourse until after the infection is cleared and treatment is fully completed. Intercourse will further irritate genital tissue and may transmit the infection to sexual partners. Another important reason to avoid intercourse during treatment is that some medications applied directly to the vaginal area contain oils that can deteriorate the latex of condoms, increasing the probability of the condom

## To Contact Us

General Information .....(252) 328-6841  
Appointments.....(252) 328-6841  
Immunizations.....(252) 328-6841  
Health Education .....(252) 328-6794  
Pharmacy .....(252) 328-6793  
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gotquestions@mail.ecu.edu

## Hours of Operation

### Fall and Spring

(Effective mid August 2001)

8:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m., Monday - Thursday  
8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Friday  
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., Saturday & Sunday, Urgent Care

### Fall and Spring Pharmacy Hours

8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Monday - Thursday  
8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Friday

### Summer

(Mid May - Mid August)

7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday - Thursday  
7:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., Friday

*After hours emergencies dial 911*

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Student Health Service  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, NC 27858

Division of Student Life

# Vaginal Infections

