

VAGINITIS, BACTERIAL

(*Gardnerella* Vaginitis; Nonspecific Vaginitis)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Vaginitis means infection or inflammation of the vagina. Nonspecific vaginitis (bacterial vaginosis) implies that any of several infecting germs, including *Gardnerella*, *Escherichia coli*, *Mycoplasma*, streptococci, or staphylococci, have caused the infection. These infections are contagious. Vaginitis can affect all ages, but most often occurs during reproductive years.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Severity of the following symptoms varies between women and from time to time in the same woman.

- Vaginal discharge that has an unpleasant odor.
- Genital swelling, burning and itching.
- Vaginal discomfort.
- Change in vaginal color from pale pink to red.
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse.

CAUSES

The germs normally present in the vagina can multiply and cause infection when the pH and hormone balance of the vagina and surrounding tissue are disturbed. *E. coli* bacteria normally inhabit the rectum and can cause infection if spread to the vagina. The following conditions increase the likelihood of infections:

- General poor health.
- Hot weather, non-ventilating clothing, especially underwear, or any other condition that increases genital moisture, warmth and darkness. These foster the growth of germs.
- Poor hygiene (sometimes).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Diabetes mellitus.
- Menopause.
- Illness that has lowered resistance.
- HIV infection.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Keep the genital area clean. Use plain unscented soap. Be sure sexual partner is clean.
- Take showers rather than tub baths.
- Wear cotton underpants or pantyhose with a cotton crotch.
- Don't sit around in wet clothing, especially a wet bathing suit.
- After urination or bowel movements, cleanse by wiping or washing from front to back (vagina to anus).
- Lose weight if you are obese.
- Avoid vaginal douches, deodorants and bubble baths.
- If you have diabetes, adhere strictly to your treatment program.
- Change tampons or pads frequently.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in 2 weeks with treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Discomfort and decreased pleasure with sexual activity.
- May indicate an underlying disorder, such as diabetes.
- Nonspecific vaginitis has been associated with preterm birth. The disorder should be carefully evaluated and treated when it occurs in pregnancy.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory studies of vaginal discharge, Pap smear and pelvic examination.
- Drug therapy will be directed to the specific organism. Your sexual partner may need treatment also. It is best not to do self-treatment for the disorder until the specific cause is determined.
- Don't douche unless prescribed for you.
- If urinating causes burning, urinate through a tubular device, such as a toilet-paper roll or plastic cup with the bottom cut out or pour a cup of warm water over genital area while you urinate.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics or antifungals to treat the infection. Metronidazole (Flagyl) is often used for treatment of bacterial vaginosis.
- Soothing vaginal creams or lotions for nonspecific forms of vaginitis may be recommended.

ACTIVITY

Avoid overexertion, heat and excessive sweating. Delay sexual relations until after treatment.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of bacterial vaginitis.
- Symptoms persist longer than 1 week or worsen, despite treatment.
- Unusual vaginal bleeding or swelling develops.