

Vaginal Discharge- Bacterial Vaginosis

The examination today suggests that you may have **Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)**. Because pelvic infection occurs a little more frequently after termination of pregnancy in women with this condition, antibiotic treatment is recommended. Bacterial vaginosis is most usually treated with tablets called metronidazole. You have been prescribed 400mg tablets to be taken 2-3 times a day (after food) for 7 days. After taking metronidazole, you should have no alcohol as nausea may result from drinking even small amounts of alcohol. Breastfeeding women should only take 5 tablets at once as a single dose (5 X 400mg tablets) and should discontinue breastfeeding for 12 hours as it may affect the colour and taste of breast milk. Vaginal discharge occurs in most women at some time in life and is usually due to one or more of the following conditions:

The role of Bacterial Vaginosis...

Vaginal discharge from this condition occurs in 10- 30% of women, is not usually serious and may require treatment if symptoms are present. Most women who have the condition have no noticeable symptoms at all. If so, there is no need for treatment as the condition generally causes no harm. Usually, those women who seek treatment for bacterial vaginosis have noticed a fishy or musty smell from the vagina that may get stronger after sexual intercourse. A few women also have soreness of the vulva and the opening of the vagina. Also, there may be a vaginal discharge that can vary from a little to a lot. The discharge is usually like white paste but can be thin frothy and watery. Not using tampons may reduce discharge and discomfort because tampons may alter the normal vaginal bacteria as well as cause more vaginal trauma.

A 2025 Australian study has provided a significant shift in understanding bacterial vaginosis (BV) and its recurrence. Traditionally, BV was viewed as a condition primarily affecting women, and treatment focused on addressing the woman's symptoms alone. However, this study has shown that untreated male partners can contribute to reinfection, leading to recurrent BV in women.

The key finding—that treating male partners for one week can dramatically reduce the recurrence of BV in women—underscores the importance of a more holistic, dual-gender approach to treating BV. By addressing the potential reservoir of infection in male partners, the risk of reinfection is lowered, which could potentially change clinical guidelines for BV treatment in the future.

This research could have major implications for public health strategies, suggesting that both partners in a sexual relationship should be treated to prevent BV recurrence. It also reinforces the idea that STIs can have a wider impact on both genders, and treating one partner without considering the other might not be effective in the long term.

Bacterial vaginosis is due to the excessive presence of bacteria which normally reside in the vagina but they can “overgrow” at times. Infections related to abortions are often caused by an ascending bacterial infection such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, mycoplasma, and bacterial vaginosis. The symptoms of bacterial vaginosis (offensive discharge and vaginal discomfort) are modified by intercourse, cyclic hormonal changes, the Pill, antibiotics, tampons and douching.

The role of Monilia (candida or thrush)....

About 40% of women with any vaginal or vulval condition also have thrush. Many symptoms, especially itchiness, may be caused by this superimposed fungal infection, so thrush often needs to be treated at the same time. Canesten Vaginal Cream (6 tubes, one each night for 6 nights) is recommended but if thrush is recurrent, you should seek further advice from your GP and have investigations.

Recurrent thrush also requires attention to genital hygiene. After going to the toilet, always wipe from the front to the back (from the vaginal area back to the anus). After using the bowels, wipe until the paper is clean and then wash by showering. Wipe gently, never so hard that the vaginal area is scratched or sore. Then blow dry and apply Canesten Topical 1% Cream (35 gm tube).

The role of Human Papillomavirus (HPV)....

Bacterial vaginosis also commonly occurs as a superimposed infection on Human Papillomavirus (HPV), a vaginal / cervical viral infection, which itself may cause no symptoms or just a slight irritation after intercourse. Intercourse aggravates the inflammation by causing small abrasions so frequent intercourse increases the symptoms. Human Papillomavirus may also cause genital warts, Papsmear abnormalities and a positive Cervical Screening Test (CST). If you have had an abnormal Pap smear or CST or have been diagnosed with HPV in the past, recurrent thrush or a persistent vaginal discharge may be a problem for you. If this applies to you, contact your doctor for further advice and treatment.

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