



9195 Grant Street, Suite 410  
Thornton, CO 80229  
Phone: 303-280-2229(BABY)  
Fax: 303-280-0765

300 Exempla Circle, Suite 470  
Lafayette, CO 80026  
303-665-6016  
303-665-0121

6363 West 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 300  
Broomfield, CO 80020  
303-460-7116  
303-460-8204

[www.whg-pc.com](http://www.whg-pc.com)

---

## **VAGINITIS**

Vaginitis is a medical term that is used to refer to any infection or inflammation of the vagina. The symptoms of vaginitis are common and most women will have at least one form of vaginitis in their lifetime. Even though vaginitis is so common, many women know little about it. The term "yeast infection" is what most women think of when they hear the word vaginitis. However, a yeast infection is only one kind of vaginal infection. Vaginitis can be caused by several different organisms, sometimes at the same time, as well as by hormonal changes, allergies, or irritations.

Because vaginitis can have many causes, it is important to see your doctor or other health care professional so that the proper cause can be identified and the correct treatment can be prescribed. Once started, the medication should be used exactly according to your doctor's instructions in order to cure the vaginitis. The symptoms may go away before you finish the medication. Even so, you should complete the therapy to help ensure a cure.

Vaginitis can sometimes be a sign of other health problems. Knowing more about the signs and symptoms of this common condition will help you and your health care provider make a proper diagnosis.

### **What is vaginitis?**

"Vaginitis" is a word that is used to describe disorders that cause infection or inflammation ("itis" means inflammation) of the vagina. Vulvovaginitis refers to inflammation of both the vagina and vulva (the external female genitals). These conditions can result from an infection caused by organisms such as bacteria, yeast, or viruses, as well as by irritations from chemicals in creams, sprays, or even clothing that are in contact with this area. In some cases, vaginitis results from organisms that are passed between sexual partners.

### **How do I know if I have vaginitis?**

The common symptoms of vaginitis are itching, burning, and vaginal discharge that is different from your normal secretions. The itching and burning can be inside the vagina or on the skin or vulva just outside the vagina. Discomfort during urination or sexual intercourse may also occur. If everyone with vaginitis had these symptoms, then the diagnosis would be fairly simple. However, it is important to realize that as many as 4 out of every 10 women with vaginitis may not have these typical symptoms. Frequently, a routine gynecologic exam will confirm vaginitis even if symptoms are not present. This is one reason why it is important to have a gynecologic exam at least every 2 years.

### **Is vaginal discharge normal?**

A woman's vagina normally produces a discharge that is usually described as clear or slightly cloudy, non-irritating, and odor-free. During the normal menstrual cycle the amount and consistency of discharge vary. At one time of the month there may be a small amount of a very thin or watery discharge and at another time, a more extensive thicker discharge may appear. All of these descriptions could be considered normal.

A vaginal discharge that has an odor or that is irritating is usually an abnormal discharge. The irritation might be itching or burning or both. The burning could feel like a bladder infection. The itching may be present at any time of the day but it is often most bothersome at night. Both of these symptoms are usually made worse by sexual intercourse. It is important to see a doctor or clinician if there has been a change in the amount, appearance, or smell of the discharge.

## What are the most common types of vaginitis?



**Trichomoniasis**

The most common types of vaginitis are:

- Candida or "yeast" vaginitis
- Bacterial vaginosis
- Trichomoniasis vaginitis
- Chlamydia vaginitis
- Viral vaginitis
- Noninfectious vaginitis

Although each of these causes of vaginal infection can have different symptoms, it is not always easy for a patient to figure out which type of vaginitis she has; in fact, diagnosis can even be tricky for an experienced clinician. Part of the problem is that sometimes more than one type of vaginitis can be present at the same time. Often vaginitis is present without any symptoms at all.

To help you better understand the major causes of vaginitis, let's look briefly at each one of them and how they are treated.

### What are Candida or "yeast" infections?

Yeast infections of the vagina are what most women think of when they hear the term "vaginitis." They are caused by one of the many species of fungus called Candida. Candida normally live in small numbers in the vagina as well as in the mouth and digestive tract of both men and women.

Yeast infections produce a thick, white vaginal discharge with the consistency of cottage cheese. Although the discharge can be somewhat watery, it is odorless. Yeast infections usually cause the vagina and the vulva to be very itchy and red.

Since yeast is normal in a woman's vagina, what makes it cause an infection? Usually this happens when a change in the delicate balance in a woman's system occurs. For example, a woman may take an antibiotic to treat a urinary tract infection and the antibiotic kills her "friendly" bacteria that normally keep the yeast in balance; as a result the yeast overgrows and causes the infection. Other factors which can upset the delicate balance include pregnancy which changes hormone levels and diabetes which allows too much sugar in the urine and vagina.

### What is noninfectious vaginitis?

Occasionally, a woman can have itching, burning, and even a vaginal discharge without having an infection. The most common cause is an allergic reaction or irritation from vaginal sprays, douches, or spermicidal products. The skin around the vagina can also be sensitive to perfumed soaps, detergents, and fabric softeners.

Another noninfectious form of vaginitis results from a decrease in hormones because of menopause or because of surgery that removes the ovaries. In this form, the vagina becomes dry or "atrophic." The woman may notice pain, especially with sexual intercourse, as well as vaginal itching and burning.

### How do you treat vaginitis?

The key to proper treatment of vaginitis is proper diagnosis. This is not always easy since the same symptoms can exist in different forms of vaginitis. You can greatly assist your health care practitioner by paying close attention to exactly which symptoms you have and when they occur, along with a description of the color, consistency, amount, and smell of any abnormal discharge. Do not douche before your office or clinic visit; it will make accurate testing difficult or impossible.

Because different types of vaginitis have different causes, the treatment needs to be specific to the type of vaginitis present. When a woman has had a yeast infection diagnosed by her doctor, she is usually treated with a prescription for a vaginal cream or suppositories. If the infection clears up for some period of time but then the exact same symptoms occur again, a woman can obtain, with her doctor or pharmacist's advice, a vaginal cream or suppository without a prescription that can completely treat the infection. The important thing to understand is that this medication may only cure the most common types of Candida associated with vaginal yeast infections and will not cure other yeast infections or any other



9195 Grant Street, Suite 410  
Thornton, CO 80229  
Phone: 303-280-2229(BABY)  
Fax: 303-280-0765

300 Exempla Circle, Suite 470  
Lafayette, CO 80026  
303-665-6016  
303-665-0121

6363 West 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 300  
Broomfield, CO 80020  
303-460-7116  
303-460-8204

[www.whg-pc.com](http://www.whg-pc.com)

type of vaginitis. If you are not absolutely sure, see your doctor. You may save the expense of buying the wrong medication and avoid delay in treating your type of vaginitis.

When obtaining these over-the-counter medicines, be sure to read all of the instructions completely before using the product. Be sure to use all of the medicine and don't stop just because your symptoms have gone away.

- Be sure to see your health care practitioner if:
- All of the symptoms do not go away completely.
- The symptoms return immediately or shortly after you finish treatment.
- You have any other serious medical problems such as diabetes.
- You might be pregnant.

Other forms of infectious vaginitis are caused by organisms that need to be treated with oral medication and/or a vaginal cream prescribed by your doctor. Products available without a prescription will probably not be effective. As with all medicine, it is important to follow your doctor's instructions as well as the instructions that come with the medication. Do not stop taking the medicine when your symptoms go away. Do not stop taking the medicine when your symptoms go away. Do not be embarrassed to ask your doctor or health care practitioner questions. Good questions to ask include: It is okay to douche while on this vaginal cream? Should you abstain from sexual intercourse during treatment? Should your sexual partner(s) be treated at the same time? Will the medication for this vaginitis agree with your other medication(s)? Should you continue the vaginal cream or suppositories during your period? Do you need to be reexamined and if so, when?

"Noninfectious" vaginitis is treated by changing the probable cause. If you have recently changed your soap or laundry detergent or have added a fabric softener, you might consider stopping the new product to see if the symptoms remain. The same instruction would apply to a new vaginal spray, douche, sanitary napkin, or tampon. If the vaginitis is due to hormonal changes, estrogen may be prescribed to help reduce symptoms.

#### **How can I prevent vaginitis?**

There are certain things that you can do to decrease the chance of getting vaginitis. If you suffer from yeast infections, it is usually helpful to avoid garments that hold in heat and moisture. The wearing of nylon panties, pantyhose without a cotton panel, and tight jeans can lead to yeast infections. Good hygiene is also important. Many doctors have found that if a woman eats yogurt that contains active cultures (read the label) she will get fewer infections.

Because they can cause vaginal irritation, most doctors do not recommend vaginal sprays or heavily perfumed soaps for cleansing this area. Likewise, repeated douching may cause irritation or, more importantly, may hide a vaginal infection.

Safe sexual practices can help prevent the passing of diseases between partners. The use of condoms is particularly important.

If you are approaching menopause, have had your ovaries removed, or have low levels of estrogen for any reason, discuss with your doctor the use of hormone pills or creams to keep the vagina lubricated and healthy.