



Bacterial vaginosis explained

Bacterial vaginosis is caused by an overgrowth of bacteria normally present in the vagina. Bacterial vaginosis is sometimes called nonspecific vaginitis or gardnerella vaginitis.

Bacterial vaginosis symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- A watery, pearly grey discharge instead of normal vaginal secretions
- A strong or unusual odour from the vagina.

Other infections may be present

Bacterial vaginosis may occur simultaneously with other infections or sexually transmitted diseases.

How bacterial vaginosis is transmitted

Although it is not clear how bacterial vaginosis is transmitted, it is more common in women who are sexually active. It sometimes develops soon after intercourse with a new partner. Women who have female sexual partners may transmit the infection on fingers or shared sex toys.

The diagnosis is made by a doctor

During a medical examination, your doctor may notice:

- The discharge or odour
- Decreased acidity of the vaginal fluid. This can occur even if you have not noticed any symptoms.

Treatment

When to treat

If you have no symptoms, treatment is usually not required. You should receive treatment if you:

- Have symptoms, or your doctor has noticed signs of bacterial vaginosis.
- You are about to have a medical procedure that could allow bacteria into the uterus.
- You are pregnant. Your obstetrician may need to be consulted about treatment.

Antibiotics are used to treat the infection

An antibiotic known as metronidazole is often used to treat the infection. You will need to:

- Take the tablets for five days
- Avoid drinking alcohol during treatment
- Take the tablets after meals. This can reduce the nausea and upset stomach that is sometimes associated with metronidazole.

Your doctor can prescribe other antibiotics or vaginal creams if you are unable to take metronidazole.

Recurrences can occur

The infection may become active again a few weeks after treatment. If bacterial vaginosis recurs several months after treatment, you may have a recurrent infection. Treating the male partner of an infected woman does not seem to reduce the risk of recurrence.

Preventing bacterial vaginosis

Most cases of bacterial vaginosis appear to be associated with sexual activity. Although no similar infection is found in men, you should always insist that casual male sexual partners use a condom. This may reduce your risk of developing bacterial vaginosis, while protecting you from other sexually transmitted diseases.

Where to get help

- Your doctor.
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9347 0244 or 1800 032 017; TTY (03) 9347 8619

Things to remember

- Bacterial vaginosis can cause a watery, pearly grey vaginal discharge and odour.
- It may develop soon after sex with a new partner.
- An antibiotic known as metronidazole is used to treat the infection.

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