



# WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT...

vaginal discharge?



## Q. What is it?

- A. Normal vaginal discharge keeps the vaginal area moist and helps to protect it from damage or infection. It is usually milky in colour and does not smell. The amount of discharge increases at certain times depending on your monthly cycle, if you are pregnant, or if you are sexually aroused or “turned on”.

Any change in the discharge may mean that something is wrong. These changes may be:

- more discharge than usual
- a change in the colour of the discharge
- sore, itchy skin around the genital area and discomfort when passing urine
- a rash, or tiny cuts in the genital skin.

## Q. What infections may affect the vagina?

- A. Women can get a number of different vaginal infections. The most common are called thrush (candidiasis), bacterial vaginosis and TV (trichomonas).

Other infections like chlamydia and gonorrhoea can also cause a heavier discharge than usual. If you notice this, especially if you have had a new sexual partner, it is best to get advice from your doctor or a Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinic.

However, it is worth remembering that while some infections may be caught by having sex with someone who has the infection, others happen without having sex.

## Q. THRUSH (CANDIDIASIS) What is thrush?

A. Thrush is caused by a yeast called candida, which usually lives quite harmlessly in the body.

You do not catch thrush by having sex, however there are many things, which can encourage yeasts to multiply and cause thrush. It might be because of:

- pregnancy
- antibiotics (some women get thrush after taking antibiotics, or, more rarely, with some other drugs)
- diabetes
- broken skin which is inflamed and scratched.
- wearing nylon underwear or tight fitting trousers (this helps the yeast to flourish in a moist, warm environment).

## Q. What are the symptoms?

A. symptoms vary from person to person and may include:

- itching, soreness and swelling around the genital area
- a thick white discharge
- discomfort during sex
- discomfort when passing urine.

## Q. How is it treated?

A. Treatment is normally simple and straightforward. You may be given tablets (pessaries) to put directly into your vagina and a soothing cream to put on your skin to ease the itching and soreness. Sometimes you might get a tablet to take by mouth.

### Q. Can I help myself?

- A. Some women find it soothing to dip a tampon into live yoghurt and put it directly into the vagina (the natural bacteria in the yoghurt may help soothe the infection). If you want to try this, make sure you have live yoghurt, which is sometimes labelled “Bio” yoghurt.

### Q. Should my partner be treated?

- A. Thrush is not caught by having sex so treatment should not be necessary. However, sometimes men get yeast caught in the skin of their penis which causes itching. If this happens, a cream can be used to clear it up.

### Q. Can I prevent thrush?

- A. Some women have repeated bouts of thrush, and it is not clear what causes this. There are things you can do to help reduce the chance of attacks:

Avoid wearing tights, nylon underwear or tight fitting trousers.

Avoid using perfumed soaps or bubble bath, vaginal deodorants, douches and disinfectants.

After going to the toilet, always wipe from front to back to avoid getting germs into the vagina.

If you get thrush when you use antibiotics, it may be worth asking your doctor to give you treatment for thrush at the same time.

If you are prone to thrush, you might want to try these suggestions. However, there is no evidence that changing your diet or stopping taking the contraceptive pill will prevent attacks.

Q. **Bacterial vaginosis** What is it?

A. This infection happens when bacteria, which normally live in the vagina in small numbers, grow and cause symptoms, it is not clear why this happens, but we know that having sex does not cause it.

Q. **What are the symptoms?**

A. Vaginal discharge, which is usually grey, but may vary in colour and/or a fishy smell, often noticed during and after sex.

Q. **How is it diagnosed?**

A. Your doctor will do an examination and take a sample of the discharge. Usually they can make a diagnosis straight away because of the typical appearance of the discharge.

Q. **How is it treated?**

A. Treatment is simple and is given in the form of tablets (metronidazole (flagyl)) or an antibiotic cream. Partners do not need treatment, but sometimes the infection can reoccur and you may need some further treatment.

Q. **Trichomonas infection (“TV” or “Trichs”)**  
What is it?

A. This is a sexually transmitted infection, which causes irritation and inflammation of the walls of the vagina.

Q. What are the symptoms?

A. These will vary, and some women may have no symptoms; if you have symptoms, they may include:

- vaginal discharge, which is often thin and watery and may be yellow or green (it can sometimes have an unpleasant smell)
- itching or soreness in the genital area
- discomfort during sex
- discomfort when passing urine.

Q. How is it treated?

A. It is easily treated with tablets you take by mouth, such as metronidazole (flagyl). It is important that your partner is treated as well, since men generally have no symptoms but may be carrying the infection.

If you are concerned and think you may have one of these infections, or you are worried about any sexually transmitted infection, you can refer yourself to the local Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) Clinic for expert advice and treatment. The telephone number for your local clinic will be in the phone book under GUM Clinic.