

Vaginal infections

The three most common vaginal infections affecting women in their reproductive age are Bacterial Vaginosis, Candidiasis and Trichomoniasis⁽¹⁾

General symptoms of vaginal infections

A change in discharge e.g. in smell or colour
An itching or a burning sensation in and around the vagina
Discomfort when urinating, or during intercourse

Candidiasis (Thrush)

Thrush is the second most common cause of vaginal discharge⁽²⁾

Thrush:

- Most commonly affects women in their thirties and forties, and those who are pregnant⁽³⁾
- Is not a sexually transmitted infection as the primary route for infection is not through sexual contact
- Sexual partners can be infected, and re-infect
- Women that aren't sexually active can get it although it is rare before puberty

Symptoms of Thrush (in women)

- Abnormal discharge - usually thick and curd-like (similar to cottage cheese)
 - Severe itching in the vaginal area, redness, irritation, and even a burning sensation
- Fishy odour is not a symptom of Candidiasis

Trichomoniasis (Trich)

Trich is the third most common vaginal infection, every year there are more than one million cases in the UK⁽⁴⁾

Trich:

- Is a sexually transmitted infection
- Anyone who is sexually active and practices unprotected sex can catch the infection and then pass it on
- Trichomoniasis occurs in both men and women
- Infection with Trich is frequently associated with other sexually transmitted infections and assists the spread of the HIV virus

Symptoms of Trichomoniasis (in women)

- Thin, frothy discharge - often yellow or green in colour
- Very strong fishy smell
- Vaginal itching and soreness
- Pain or discomfort when passing urine
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse

Bacterial Vaginosis

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is considered to be the most common cause of abnormal vaginal discharge in women of child bearing age⁽⁵⁾

BV:

- Affects between 15-20% of adult women in the UK at any given time
- Occurs when there is a marked disruption to the balance of the normal vaginal bacteria
- Is not caused by one particular micro organism
- Is usually the most prominent bacteria, the lactobacilli are vastly reduced, or disappear in their place large numbers of other bacteria overgrow
- It is not a sexually transmitted infection
- Women that are not sexually active can get BV

Although many people have not heard of BV it is about twice as common as Candidiasis⁽⁶⁾, and experts estimate that at least 1 in 3 women, and perhaps most women, will develop BV at some point in their lives⁽⁷⁾

Symptoms of BV

- Unpleasant 'fishy' odour
- Abnormal discharge (usually thin and greyish in colour)
- Vaginal discomfort

Not every woman who has BV has all of these symptoms - they can be present in any combination and around 50% ⁽¹⁰⁾ of cases of BV are asymptomatic. Itching and a thick white discharge are not symptoms of BV. However, some women may refer to discomfort as itching

BV is not caused by poor hygiene; in fact excessive washing of the vagina may alter the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina making BV more likely to develop