

# Yeast Infections (*Candida* Vaginitis)

Yeast infections of the vagina, particularly with *Candida* yeast, are a common problem in teenage girls. These infections cause pain and itching, sometimes with a white, creamy discharge from the vagina. Effective medications are available, but it's important to visit the doctor to make sure that yeast infection is the cause of the problem.

## What are yeast infections?

Yeast infections are a fairly common problem in girls, beginning in puberty. Doctors estimate that three fourths of women will have a yeast infection some time during their lives. A family of yeasts called *Candida* is the most common cause of infection. These infections are sometimes called *Candida* vaginitis or “candidiasis.”

Most yeast infections clear up rapidly with treatment with antifungal medications, some of which are available without a prescription. However, other vaginal infections can cause similar symptoms. To ensure proper treatment, the doctor may need to perform tests to be sure of the cause of the infection.

## What do they look like?

The main symptoms of yeast infections are:

- Irritation of the vagina and surrounding tissues (vulva): burning or itching.
- Pain when urinating.
- Fluid draining (discharge) from the vagina. The fluid varies but often has a white, “cheesy” appearance.
- Pain during intercourse. Yeast infections are usually not spread to a partner through sex.

## What causes yeast infections?

- Infection with *Candida* yeasts, especially *Candida albicans*, is the most common cause of yeast infection. It's normal to have small numbers of yeasts or fungi in the vagina. Symptoms of vaginitis only occur when the yeasts increase and grow out of control.
- Similar symptoms can be caused by other infections, such as bacterial vaginosis and infection with the parasite *Trichomonas*. To ensure proper diagnosis and treatment, have your child see your doctor.

## What are some possible complications of yeast infections?

- Yeast infections usually clear up promptly with treatment but may come back. For some women, yeast infections are a frequently recurring problem.

## What puts you at risk of yeast infections?

Yeast infections are a common problem for women and girls, beginning in the teen years. They are uncommon in younger girls, unless risk factors are present.

Risk factors for yeast infections include:

- Poor hygiene.
- Wearing tight clothing and underwear that does not allow for ventilation.
- Using certain soaps and cosmetics, including douches and perfumed hygiene sprays.
- Certain diseases, such as diabetes.
- Recent antibiotic treatment for a bacterial infection.
- Pregnancy.
- Using oral contraceptives (birth control pills).

## Can yeast infections be prevented?

Avoid the risk factors listed above. Cotton underwear provides the best ventilation.

## How are yeast infections diagnosed and treated?

- To determine whether a yeast infection is causing your child's symptoms, the doctor may look at a sample of her vaginal discharge under the microscope. If this yeast is present, effective antifungal (yeast-killing) drugs are available to treat the infection.
- Some antifungal medications can be bought at the drug-store without a prescription. However, a doctor's visit is still a good idea to make sure the cause of the vaginitis is correctly identified. Your doctor may recommend a prescription-only antifungal drug.
- These medications may be given as creams or suppositories. A single-dose pill medication is available as well. Your doctor can recommend the best treatment for your situation.

- If your doctor gives you a prescription for antifungal drugs, make sure to finish the prescription, even if the symptoms have gotten better. Stopping treatment too early may allow the infection to come back.



### **When should I call your office?**

Call our office if the symptoms (vaginal burning, itching, or discharge) do not get better with treatment or if they return after treatment.