



Vaginal Symptoms

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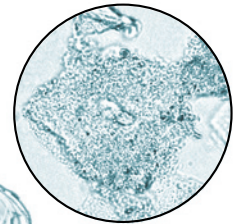
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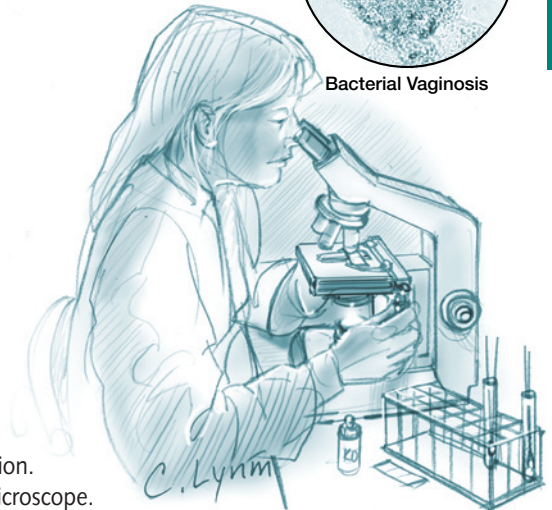
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Vaginal Symptoms

Vaginal symptoms are one of the most common reasons for which women seek medical care. Vaginal complaints account for approximately 10 million medical office visits per year. Most vaginal symptoms are not a sign of a serious disease such as cancer or AIDS, and the majority of such symptoms are not due to a sexually transmitted disease. The March 17, 2004, issue of JAMA includes an article about diagnosing vaginal symptoms.



Bacterial Vaginosis



DIAGNOSING VAGINAL SYMPTOMS

- The vagina and surrounding areas are examined for redness or inflammation.
- A sample of any discharge is taken for testing and observation under a microscope.

COMMON CAUSES OF VAGINAL SYMPTOMS

- **Bacterial vaginosis**—An inflammation of the vagina caused by bacteria, this condition is responsible for 40% to 50% of vaginal symptoms. Symptoms often include a fishy-smelling discharge and itching or burning in the vagina.
- **Trichomoniasis**—Infections with *Trichomonas*, a protozoan organism, is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD). The most common symptoms are a yellow, frothy discharge and pain during intercourse. About 15% to 20% of vaginal symptoms are caused by trichomoniasis.
- **Vaginal candidiasis**—Also known as a **yeast infection**, this condition is caused by an overgrowth of fungus that occurs naturally in the vagina and accounts for about 20% to 25% of vaginal symptoms. Women often experience intense vaginal itching and a thick, white, cottage cheese-like discharge.

TREATMENT

- Antibiotic or antifungal medications can be taken orally, applied to the vagina as creams or gels, or inserted into the vagina as suppositories.
- Women whose vaginal symptoms have not been diagnosed should not use over-the-counter therapies until they have a medical evaluation to determine the cause.

PREVENTING VAGINAL INFECTIONS

- Using a condom can help prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including trichomoniasis, and a condom should always be used if you are being treated for trichomoniasis to prevent reinfection by your partner.
- Avoid using douches and vaginal deodorant sprays.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
800/762-2264
www.acog.org
- National Women's Health Information Center
800/994-WOMAN (9662)
www.4woman.gov

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To find this and other JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. A Patient Page on screening and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases was published in the January 3, 2001, issue.

Sources: American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Child Health & Human Development

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