

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

About 75% percent of all women are likely to have at least one yeast infection during their lifetime¹

Q. What are the causes of yeast infections?

A. Yeast infections are caused by a single-celled fungus, often by the species *Candida albicans*. Because these yeasts are a normal part of the healthy flora for most individuals, it's not their presence that causes concern, but rather their numbers. As opportunistic organisms that proliferate when conditions are right, yeasts create problems when their reproduction goes unchecked.

Some of the factors that can cause yeast infections include:

- Use of birth control pills: due to increased estrogen levels
- Having a weakened immune system - due to an inability to keep yeast numbers at bay
- Use of antibiotics - which can wipe out "friendly" bacteria that help control yeasts
- Pregnancy - due to elevated estrogen levels
- Diabetes - since higher amounts of available glucose (sugar) in the body can cause yeast to multiply

Symptoms of yeast infections include itching and soreness in the vagina and vulva, sometimes accompanied by pain and a burning sensation during urination or sex. Yeast infections may result in odorless vaginal discharge that resembles cottage cheese. To treat these infections, anti-yeast creams or suppositories are usually placed inside the vagina. Antifungal prescription tablets can also be taken orally.

In addition to being mindful of the factors listed above, you can help prevent yeast infections by avoiding tight-fitting clothes and synthetic materials (cotton underwear is best); wiping from front to back after using the bathroom; and not using douches, feminine hygiene sprays or deodorized/scented pads or tampons.

It's also important to note that what many women consider yeast infections are in fact bacterial in origin, since the difference between bacterial vaginosis (BV) and yeast infections can be confusing. With separate treatment courses as well as potential health risks, it's best to see a health care provider if you are not absolutely sure which you have.

To schedule an appointment with the Women's Health Clinic at Campus Health call 621-9202 or visit Campus Health at the Highland Commons Building near 6th St. and Highland Ave.

¹ Mardh P, Rodrigues A, et al. "Facts and myths on recurrent vulvovaginal candidosis". *Int J STD AIDS* 2002;13:522-39.



Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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