

Patient information from BMJ

Last published: Nov 28, 2018

Thrush

If you have thrush, you get a discharge from your vagina. You may also feel itchy and sore. Thrush is usually easy to get rid of, but some women find it keeps coming back.

This information is about thrush that affects your vagina. It's also possible to get a similar infection that affects other parts of your body, such as your mouth.

What is thrush?

Thrush is usually caused by a type of yeast called *Candida albicans*. *Candida* lives naturally in your body. But if too much of this yeast grows in your vagina, it causes thrush.

Thrush isn't usually serious. But if it doesn't go away with treatment, or keeps coming back, there's a chance it could be a sign of another health problem. See your doctor if this happens.

Doctors don't normally think of thrush as a sexually transmitted infection. A few men get a rash on their penis after sex with a woman who has thrush. This can be easily treated by an antifungal cream. If both partners have thrush, they can re-infect each other, so they should both get treatment at the same time.

Women often get thrush after being treated with antibiotics.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom of thrush is a discharge from your vagina. This is usually thick and white, but some women get a watery discharge. The area outside your vagina may also feel sore and itchy.

A lot of women treat thrush themselves. If you have symptoms for the first time, or aren't sure what's causing your symptoms, see your doctor.

What treatments work?

Things you can do for yourself

The yeast that causes thrush grows best in warm, moist conditions. So, wearing loose, cotton underclothes and stockings rather than tights may help prevent thrush.

Thrush

If you have diabetes, you may be more likely to get thrush. If you get thrush often, ask your doctor for a diabetes test.

Some people think the type of contraceptive you use affects your chance of getting thrush. You might want to ask your doctor about trying a different contraceptive if your thrush keeps coming back.

Drug treatments

Some drugs for thrush come as a cream or a pessary (a tablet you put in your vagina). Others come as tablets you swallow. Tablets you take by mouth work just as well as treatments you put in your vagina.

You can buy some of these drugs from a pharmacy, but others need to be prescribed by your doctor.

You put the pessaries in at night. It's fine to use them during your period. You can get combination packs containing pessaries to treat the infection and a cream to help with irritation.

You may only need one dose. Most women don't get side effects, but you could get irritation in your vagina. There's a chance that creams or pessaries could damage condoms or diaphragms.

Fluconazole tablets (Canesten Oral Capsule, Diflucan One) can clear up thrush with one dose. You can ask your doctor for a prescription or buy them at a pharmacy. Some women get side effects, such as a headache, abdominal pain, or nausea. You shouldn't take fluconazole if you're pregnant.

If you keep getting thrush, your doctor might suggest you keep using your medicine regularly.

Other treatments

Some women try natural remedies for thrush, including tea tree oil, garlic, and yoghurt. We don't know if these really help. Putting these substances inside your vagina could cause irritation.

What will happen to me?

Thrush usually clears up with treatment. Even without treatment, it will probably go away on its own.

Thrush doesn't cause any long-term damage. If you're pregnant and have thrush, it won't hurt your baby.

Thrush

The patient information from *BMJ Best Practice* from which this leaflet is derived is regularly updated. The most recent version of Best Practice can be found at bestpractice.bmj.com. This information is intended for use by health professionals. It is not a substitute for medical advice. It is strongly recommended that you independently verify any interpretation of this material and, if you have a medical problem, see your doctor.

Please see BMJ's full terms of use at: bmj.com/company/legal-information. BMJ does not make any representations, conditions, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that this material is accurate, complete, up-to-date or fit for any particular purposes.

© BMJ Publishing Group Ltd 2018. All rights reserved.

