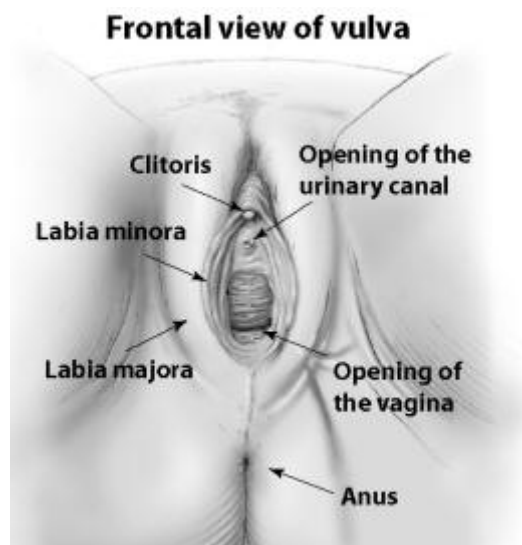




Do you know the difference between normal vaginal discharge and abnormal vaginal discharge? Did you know that having a vaginal discharge is normal? Let's take a look at various types of vaginal discharges so that you'll know when you have an abnormal vaginal discharge.

The Natural Vagina

The basic function of your vagina is to provide a route from the outside of your vagina to your uterus and the rest of your internal reproductive system. The natural, acidic, pH of your vagina acts to prevent infections. The acidic nature of your vagina is caused by natural, good, bacteria produced by your body. When your vagina is healthy, the vagina keeps itself clean and in a healthy state by producing secretions of normal vaginal discharge. The natural balance of the vagina can be disrupted by anything that interferes with its' normal environment.



What is Normal Vaginal Discharge?

First it's important to understand that all women experience some amount of vaginal discharge. Glands in your vagina and cervix produce small amounts of fluid that flows out of your vagina everyday taking with it old cells that line the vagina. Your normal vaginal discharge helps to clean the vagina, as well as keep it lubricated and free from infection and other germs. A normal vaginal discharge does not have a foul odor and usually has no odor at all. Normal vaginal discharge often appears clear or milky when it dries on your clothing;

occasionally you may notice white spots or a normal vaginal discharge that is thin and stringy looking.

Other things that may cause changes in the appearance or consistency of your vaginal discharge include:

- Your menstrual cycle
- Emotional stress
- Pregnancy
- Any medications you take including hormones such as the Pill
- Sexual excitement
- Breastfeeding
- Ovulation
- Your diet

Other things that can upset the natural pH balance of your vagina and lead to vaginal infections include feminine hygiene products, perfumed or deodorant soaps, antibiotics, pregnancy, diabetes, or the presence of another infection. Your menstrual cycle has a significant affect on the type of vaginal discharge you experience throughout the month. Did you know you're more likely to experience vaginal infections just before or during your period? This is because the pH balance of your vagina varies during your monthly cycle causing the acidic level of your vagina to be at its' lowest point a few days before and during your period. About halfway between your periods an increase in vaginal discharge that appears clear is normal. This increased wetness and clear vaginal discharge is an indication of ovulation.

Some signs that may indicate an abnormal vaginal discharge and infection include:

- ❑ Changes in color, consistency, or amount
- ❑ Constant, increased vaginal discharge
- ❑ Presence of itching, discomfort, or any rash
- ❑ Vaginal burning during urination
- ❑ The presence of blood when it's not your period time
- ❑ Cottage cheese-like vaginal discharge
- ❑ A foul odor and yellowish, greenish, or grayish-white vaginal discharge

If you have a vaginal discharge along with any of these signs, consult your health care provider for diagnosis and treatment. Vaginal discharges are common and you it's likely you'll have at least one vaginal infection in your life.

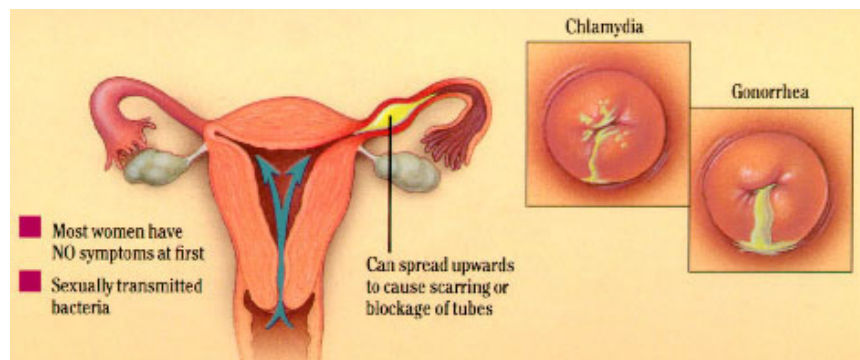
Vaginal yeast infections are also very common and over-the-counter treatments are available; however, it's important to never self-diagnose a vaginal yeast infection unless you have previously been diagnosed by your health care provider.

When should you see your doctor?

You should see your doctor immediately if you have an abnormal vaginal discharge accompanied by any of the following:

- If you feel weak, fatigued, or especially sick
- Anytime you have a yellow or green vaginal discharge and a fever
- If you experience abdominal pain or steady pain for more than 2 hours
- If your vaginal area appears red, inflamed, or fever is present

You should consult your health care provider within one day, during office hours, anytime you have symptoms or concerns that you think need to be addressed, as well as whenever you have a vaginal discharge accompanied by a foul odor or that has an abnormal color such as gray, green, or yellow. Anytime you experience a vaginal discharge during pregnancy you need to see your health care provider for diagnosis and treatment.



Other signs you should see your health care provider within 24 hours include:

- Intermittent, mild, lower abdominal pain
- Pain during or immediately after sexual intercourse
- Vaginal pain or painful rash
- Any sores or blisters in the vaginal area

If you think you may have a sexually transmitted disease, or if you have the symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection, and you have not previously been diagnosed with a yeast infection, call your doctor as soon as possible.

How to prevent and manage vaginal discharge

Many factors can play a role in the occurrence of vaginal infections and discharge. What can you do to reduce your risk of vaginal infections?

Practicing these simple tips will significantly reduce your risk of getting a vaginal infection:

- Always wear white cotton panties. Cotton allows your genital area to breathe, helping the vaginal area to stay dry. It's also a good idea to wear panties only during the day and not at night when you are sleeping.
- Don't use vaginal douches.
- Never use petroleum jelly or oils for vaginal lubrication. This can create a breeding ground for bacteria to grow.
- If you are being treated for a vaginal infection, use all the medication as directed even if you think you are better.
- Don't have sexual intercourse during treatment for a vaginal infection and until you have no more symptoms.
- Avoid vaginal contact with products that can irritate the vagina such as feminine hygiene products, perfumed or deodorant soaps, powders, lotions, and bubble baths.
- Always avoid prolonged wearing of tight-fitting clothing such as bathing suits, exercise wear, pantyhose, or slacks.
- Many times, vaginal infections cause intense itching - don't scratch! Scratching infected, inflamed areas will only make things worse.
- If your period starts while you are using vaginal creams or suppositories, continue your regular medication schedule during your period and don't use tampons – use pads instead.
- If you are self-treating a vaginal infection and your symptoms are not improved after treatment, see your health care provider for a vaginal exam. Don't use any vaginal products or treatments for 48 hours before your appointment.
- Always use condoms during sexual intercourse unless you are in a long-term monogamous relationship.
- Always wipe from front to back after urination or having a bowel movement. Improper wiping easily spreads bacteria to the vagina and may lead to vaginal discharge and infection.

Of course good basic hygiene, plenty of sleep, and well-rounded nutrition with an appropriate fluid intake are always good idea for vaginal health, as well as for your overall health and well-being.

Remember always to check with your physician if you are unsure of the nature of your vaginal discharge.

Appointments

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Adapted from About.com