

Patient leaflet

Vaginal thrush

What is vaginal thrush?

It's an infection of the vagina (front passage) with a fungus called 'candida' - although infection is probably too strong a word. In fact, this fungus 'lives' in the vagina - without causing any particular problem - in 40% of women at any one time. We all have bugs living on our skin - this is normal and not a sign of poor hygiene - and the thrush fungus is just one of them. Sometimes, though, the fungus becomes more widespread and that's when it causes symptoms.

What are the typical symptoms of thrush?

The usual ones are a thick white vaginal discharge, with itching and soreness. Some women find it makes the vagina too sore for sex, and it can cause stinging on passing water, too.

What triggers it?

Very often it just seems to be a random event. A common trigger, though, is a course of antibiotics. This is because antibiotics can wipe out the other 'normal' bugs on your skin which compete with candida, allowing it to spread. Other triggers are pregnancy, diabetes and sex - though it's not a sexually transmitted disease.

Do I need tests?

If you've had thrush before and the symptoms are the same, then no. In fact, many women buy treatment over-the-counter for thrush. But if it's different to previous episodes of thrush, you think you might be at risk of a sexually transmitted disease

or you have any other particular worry, you should see our GP: you might need to be examined and/or have a swab test taken from your vagina. You might need the same type of check-up if an attack doesn't seem to be settling down with treatment, or you keep getting attacks. If you have very troublesome thrush, or symptoms of diabetes like severe thirst, your doctor will check you for diabetes, too.

Is it dangerous?

Not at all. It's a nuisance but it causes no serious harm. And if you suffer thrush while pregnant, it won't hurt your baby.

What is the treatment?

The usual treatment involves pessaries or creams which are applied around or inside your vagina. Tablet treatments are also available. If you're getting frequent attacks of thrush, your doctor may advise taking a pessary or a tablet once a week for six months to try to prevent the problem.

Is there anything else I can do to prevent attacks?

As the thrush fungus likes moist, airless areas, avoiding tight-fitting clothing may help. And don't over-wash - remember, thrush is nothing to do with hygiene and overdoing soaps and bubble baths can just make matters worse. There's no need to change your contraceptive pill if you take one as there isn't thought to be any link to the pill. And thrush isn't transmitted sexually - it's not necessary for your partner to use a cream unless he has symptoms such as a very itchy, red foreskin.