



Thrush

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While every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, it cannot replace medical advice. Please visit a health professional if you have any concerns with your health. Included below is a list of places where you can get more information.

What is thrush?

Vaginal thrush (or candidiasis) is a common fungal infection. It mainly affects women, and can be irritating and painful.

Many fungi live in the vagina and rarely cause any problems. Thrush is caused when there is an overgrowth of a fungus called Candida that lives naturally in warm, moist places such as the mouth, bowel, vagina and the foreskin of the penis.

Normally, your body and vaginal bacteria stop the overgrowth of Candida. However, if these change, the fungus can quickly multiply, leading to thrush.

How do you get thrush?

You can get thrush without sexual contact, but it can be spread between partners, and sex can make it worse.

Thrush is more likely to occur if:

- you're pregnant
- you're taking the contraceptive pill
- you're taking medication such as antibiotics (which can kill off normal, healthy bacteria as well as disease-causing ones)
- you have undiagnosed or poorly controlled diabetes
- your immune system is suppressed (such as during chemotherapy)
- you're under a lot of stress.

It's also more common at certain times in the menstrual cycle, particularly the week before and after the period.



What are the signs and symptoms of thrush?

Symptoms of thrush vary. In women they include:

- white and cheesy-looking discharge, often thick with a yeasty smell
- stinging pain when passing urine
- pain or discomfort during sex
- itchy and swollen genitals.

Symptoms for men normally include red spots or a rash on the penis, scrotum or groin. Some uncircumcised men have Candida under the foreskin, but have no symptoms. They can still pass on Candida during sex.

How do I know if I have thrush?

Most thrush can be diagnosed by a simple genital examination. A swab from the affected area can also be taken and tested in a laboratory.

What do I do if I have thrush?

You can buy pessaries (dissolving tablets you put into the vagina) and creams from your pharmacy. Complete the treatment even if you are having a period. If these treatments don't work or if you often get thrush, see a doctor as you may have other health problems or a drug-resistant type of Candida.

How do I get treated?

If pessaries and creams do not treat the thrush, go and see your GP or doctor of your choice. The doctor will take a swab test to find out if it's thrush or something else. Your sex partners may need treatment at the same time to stop you catching it again.

Men should apply the cream to the genital area, penis and, if uncircumcised, under the foreskin.

Natural yoghurt can help soothe the area but won't cure thrush.

How do I reduce the risks of getting thrush?

- Wear loose pants or skirts, and cotton underwear. Tight or synthetic clothes stop air movement, providing a moist area, ideal for bacteria and fungi to grow.
- Always wash your hands after you have been to the toilet and before touching the vaginal area.
- Always wipe yourself from front to back after going to the toilet.
- Don't have vaginal sex straight after anal sex. Wash thoroughly after anal sex and use a new condom and water based lubricant before vaginal sex.
- Wash the genital area with water only. After washing, gently wipe the area dry.
- Avoid soaps or sprays in the genital area, as they can cause irritation.
- Thrush can be passed on through sex. Always use condoms, dental dams and water based lubricant when having sex to avoid this and other sexually transmitted infections.

Where can I find more information on thrush?

For further information contact your GP, a doctor of your choice, telephone Health Direct (1800 022 222) or the Sexual Health Helpline (9227 6178 for metropolitan callers or 1800 198 205 for country callers).

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