

VAGINAL THRUSH

Vaginal thrush is a fungal infection that affects most women at some point. The skin around your vagina may feel itchy and sore and you may have a discharge from your vagina (thick and white, or thin and watery, and does not smell). Sometimes, the inside of your vagina may itch and it may hurt to wee or to have sex.

Candida (the yeast causing vaginal thrush) often lives in your vagina and on the skin around it without causing problems. But if the numbers of Candida in and around your vagina start increasing, you may get vaginal thrush.

You are more likely to get vaginal thrush if you:

- take antibiotics
- have diabetes
- are pregnant
- have a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy or other medicines or conditions
- have some damage to your vagina – this can happen if your vagina is too dry during sex
- are in your 20s or 30s.

How can I treat vaginal thrush?

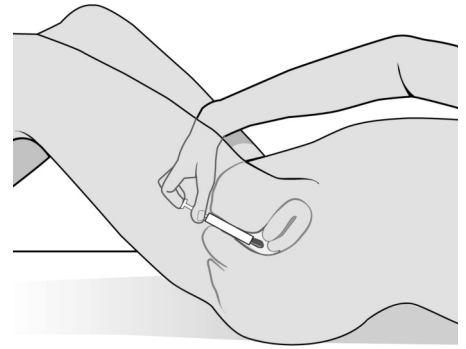
Use an antifungal medicine, such as clotrimazole or fluconazole. Ask your pharmacist which treatment would be best for you.

Clotrimazole comes as a high-strength (10%) cream and a pessary to put into your vagina at bedtime. The pack includes an applicator to help you do this. For the 10% cream and 500mg pessary, you will only need one treatment. Lower-strength clotrimazole pessaries are available from your pharmacy but not through the Choose Pharmacy scheme.

A pessary is a solid tablet that will dissolve once inside your vagina. Avoid using pessaries during your period as they might not stay in your vagina long enough to work properly. It is best to use these products just before bedtime. Lying down will reduce leakage of the medicine from your vagina.

- Wash your vaginal area with a mild soap and water and dry thoroughly.
- Remove the applicator and pessary from their packaging, pull out the plunger on the applicator until it stops and add the pessary (see the instructions on the box).

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and legs slightly apart.
- Gently insert the applicator into your vagina as deep as is comfortable and push the plunger of the applicator until it stops. Remove the applicator from the vagina.
- Discard the applicator and wash your hands thoroughly.
- Spread the lower-strength clotrimazole cream (2%) thinly on your vulva and the area around it to help with itching and soreness. Do this 2 or 3 times a day.



Clotrimazole can damage condoms and diaphragms. Don't rely on condoms or diaphragms for contraception while you're using clotrimazole, or for at least 5 days after using it.

Fluconazole is a single capsule that you take by mouth as a one-off treatment. If your vulva is itchy and sore, use the clotrimazole cream (2%) as well. Don't take fluconazole capsules if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Ask your pharmacist if taking fluconazole will affect other medicines you're taking.

What else can help?

- Clean the area around your vulva with water and a moisturising soap substitute. Don't do this more than once a day. Ask your pharmacist to help you choose a suitable soap substitute.
- Use a greasy emollient (moisturiser) several times a day on your vulva. Ask your pharmacist for help choosing an emollient. Emollients can make condoms less effective. Don't rely on condoms or diaphragms for contraception while you are using emollients, or for at least 5 days after you stop using emollients.

Avoid:

- wearing tight-fitting underwear or tights - Candida thrives in warm, damp, air-free conditions.
- using toiletries, douches, wipes and feminine hygiene products containing perfumes and alcohol.
- washing your underwear in biological washing powder. Don't use fabric conditioners.

Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if you:

- are under 16 years or over 60 years old.
- are pregnant. Vaginal thrush won't harm your baby, but not all treatments for it are suitable for pregnant women.
- are breastfeeding.
- have a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy or other medicines or conditions.
- are weeing more than usual.
- have had vaginal thrush more than twice in the last 6 months.
- have diabetes, but you don't have good control of your blood sugar, and you haven't seen your doctor in the last 3 months.
- have used a vaginal thrush treatment, but you had a bad reaction to it.

- have used a vaginal thrush treatment for a week, but the thrush has not gone away. This could mean that you don't have vaginal thrush, or that it may have been caused by an unusual type of Candida.
- have a discharge that smells or you have blisters or sores close to your vagina.
- or your partner have ever had a sexually transmitted infection and you think it might have returned.
- have pain in your lower tummy, or bleeding from your vagina when you are not having your period.

Can I give vaginal thrush to other people?

Yes, vaginal thrush can be passed on during sex, but this does not happen often. Your partner doesn't need to be tested or treated if they don't have symptoms.

Where can I find further information?

Patient UK: www.patient.info/health/vaginal-thrush-yeast-infection

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.