
Did You Know!

Volume 12, Number 5

SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE HEALTH CENTER

March 2008

Mary, Mary Quite Contrary. . .

*How Does Your **Flora** Grow?*



Like many other parts of our bodies, a women's vagina contains a flora of healthful bacteria that create a balanced environment and specific pH. When this balance is disrupted, it allows other unhealthy organisms to become established and cause a vaginal infection. Many women may be surprised to learn that not all vaginal infections are caused by yeast. In fact, it is unhealthy *bacteria* that causes the most common form of vaginal infection called **bacterial vaginosis** (BV).

Bacterial Vaginosis: More Common and More Serious

Although many women have never heard of BV, it is more common than a yeast infection and can be associated with an increased chance of several gynecological problems. Women with BV are predisposed to pelvic inflammatory disease, premature deliveries, and infections following gynecologic surgery. It also puts them at increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

Yeast Infection Treatments Can't Cure BV

Over the counter medications that treat yeast infections are not effective in killing the bacteria that cause BV. Treatment of BV requires a prescription medication from your health care provider. The medication ordered for BV may be given in an oral form or in a gel that is inserted into the vagina.

Disruption of Vaginal Balance

Activities that alter the healthy balance of the vagina provide the opportunity for a yeast or bacterial infection to become established. Douching, the use of other feminine hygiene products, antibiotic therapy, sexually transmitted diseases, or simply changing sexual partners can change the balance of the vagina.

Before You Treat Yourself, Carefully Consider Your Symptoms

Yeast has thick, white, cottage cheese-like drainage, no odor, and usually causes itching and irritation of the vaginal area.

BV has thin milky white or gray drainage, a fishy or unpleasant odor, and sometimes is associated with itching or irritation of the vaginal area.

Yeast or Bacterial? New Help in Deciding

Vaginal screening kits that measure the pH of the vagina are now available in most pharmacies over the counter. If a woman has symptoms of vaginosis with a pH of 5.0 or greater it is likely that she has a bacterial infection and she should seek medical help for treatment. A pH of 4.5 indicates a yeast infection that can be treated with an over the counter yeast medication. Vagisil offers two vaginal screening kits for about \$16.00.

Don't be Embarrassed

Vaginal infections are common to women of all ages, regardless of whether they are sexually active. Vaginal yeast and bacterial infections are not considered sexually transmitted diseases and current guidelines *do not* recommend the treatment of sexual partners.