

# VAGINITIS, BACTERIAL

( *Gardnerella* Vaginitis; Nonspecific Vaginitis)

## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Vaginitis means infection or inflammation of the vagina. Nonspecific vaginitis (bacterial vaginosis) implies that any of several infecting germs, including *Gardnerella*, *Escherichia coli*, *Mycoplasma*, streptococci, or staphylococci, have caused the infection. These infections are contagious. Vaginitis can affect all ages, but most often occurs during reproductive years.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Severity of the following symptoms varies between women and from time to time in the same woman.

- Vaginal discharge that has an unpleasant odor.
- Genital swelling, burning and itching.
- Vaginal discomfort.
- Change in vaginal color from pale pink to red.
- Discomfort during sexual intercourse.

### CAUSES

The germs normally present in the vagina can multiply and cause infection when the pH and hormone balance of the vagina and surrounding tissue are disturbed. *E. coli* bacteria normally inhabit the rectum and can cause infection if spread to the vagina. The following conditions increase the likelihood of infections:

- General poor health.
- Hot weather, non-ventilating clothing, especially underwear, or any other condition that increases genital moisture, warmth and darkness. These foster the growth of germs.
- Poor hygiene (sometimes).

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Diabetes mellitus.
- Menopause.
- Illness that has lowered resistance.
- HIV infection.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Keep the genital area clean. Use plain unscented soap. Be sure sexual partner is clean.
- Take showers rather than tub baths.
- Wear cotton underpants or pantyhose with a cotton crotch.
- Don't sit around in wet clothing, especially a wet bathing suit.
- After urination or bowel movements, cleanse by wiping or washing from front to back (vagina to anus).
- Lose weight if you are obese.
- Avoid vaginal douches, deodorants and bubble baths.

- If you have diabetes, adhere strictly to your treatment program.

- Change tampons or pads frequently.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in 2 weeks with treatment.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Discomfort and decreased pleasure with sexual activity.
- May indicate an underlying disorder, such as diabetes.
- Nonspecific vaginitis has been associated with preterm birth. The disorder should be carefully evaluated and treated when it occurs in pregnancy.

## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory studies of vaginal discharge, Pap smear and pelvic examination.
- Drug therapy will be directed to the specific organism. Your sexual partner may need treatment also. It is best not to do self-treatment for the disorder until the specific cause is determined.
- Don't douche unless prescribed for you.
- If urinating causes burning, urinate through a tubular device, such as a toilet-paper roll or plastic cup with the bottom cut out or pour a cup of warm water over genital area while you urinate.

### MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics or antifungals to treat the infection. Metronidazole (Flagyl) is often used for treatment of bacterial vaginosis.
- Soothing vaginal creams or lotions for nonspecific forms of vaginitis may be recommended.

### ACTIVITY

Avoid overexertion, heat and excessive sweating. Delay sexual relations until after treatment.

### DIET

No special diet.

## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of bacterial vaginitis.
- Symptoms persist longer than 1 week or worsen, despite treatment.
- Unusual vaginal bleeding or swelling develops.

Adapted from Instructions for Patients, Sixth Edition, H. Winter Griffith, M.D., W.B Saunders Company.