

BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS

What causes bacterial vaginosis?

The cause of bacterial vaginosis – sometimes called BV – is not really understood. In women who have bacterial vaginosis you find:

- Less of the normal vaginal bacteria (lactobacilli).
- An overgrowth of other types of bacteria in the vagina.
- A change in pH of the vagina (acid/alkaline balance) with the vagina becoming more alkaline.

How do you get bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis can occur if you:

- Use scented soaps or perfumed bubble bath.
- Put antiseptic liquids in the bath.
- Douche or use vaginal deodorant.
- Use strong detergents to wash your underwear.
- Smoke.

Hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle, semen in the vagina after sex without a condom, use of an intrauterine contraceptive device and genetic factors may also play a part.

Bacterial vaginosis is not a sexually transmitted infection, but women who are sexually active and have had a change of partner are more likely to have it, including women in same sex relationships.

What are the signs and symptoms of bacterial vaginosis?

Around half of women with bacterial vaginosis will not have any signs or symptoms at all, or may not be aware of them. If you do get symptoms you **might** notice a change in your usual discharge. This may increase, become thin and watery, change to a white/grey colour and develop a strong, unpleasant, fishy smell, especially after intercourse. Bacterial vaginosis is not associated with itching or irritation.

How will I know if I have bacterial vaginosis?

You can only be certain you have bacterial vaginosis if you have a test. If you think you may have bacterial vaginosis talk to a doctor or nurse. It is recommended that you have a test if you have signs and symptoms of bacterial vaginosis. You may notice these yourself or they may be noticed by a doctor or nurse during a vaginal examination.

Some women may also be offered a test during pregnancy and before some gynaecological procedures or an abortion.

It is important that you don't delay getting advice if you think you may have been at risk of a sexually transmitted infection.

What can be done if bacterial vaginosis keeps coming back?

We don't know why bacterial vaginosis keeps recurring in some women. There is no agreed way of treating recurrent infection. Some women may be given a course of antibiotic gel to use over a number of months. Other women may be given antibiotic tablets to use at the start and end of their period. There is currently no evidence that the use of live yogurt or lactobacillus acidophilus (available over the counter) is helpful.

Does my partner need treatment?

There is no evidence that it is helpful to treat your sexual partner if you have bacterial vaginosis.

Will bacterial vaginosis affect my chances of getting pregnant?

There is no evidence that bacterial vaginosis will affect your chances of getting pregnant.

What happens if I get bacterial vaginosis when I'm pregnant?

Bacterial vaginosis may cause problems with a pregnancy. The infection has been found in some women who have had a miscarriage, a premature birth or a low birth weight baby.

Bacterial vaginosis can safely be treated when you are pregnant and when you are breastfeeding – this won't harm the baby, but do tell the doctor or nurse that you are pregnant. This will influence the type of treatment that you are given.

Pregnant women who have had a previous premature birth will usually be offered a test for bacterial vaginosis.

Does bacterial vaginosis cause cervical cancer?

There is no evidence that bacterial vaginosis causes cervical cancer.