

THRUSH

What is thrush?

Thrush is usually caused by the yeast fungus *Candida albicans*. This yeast lives harmlessly on the skin and in the mouth, gut and vagina. Normally it is kept under control by harmless bacteria. Occasionally, however, conditions change and the yeast increases rapidly, causing signs and symptoms. This is commonly known as thrush, thrush infection or candida, and sometimes as monilia. In this leaflet we use the term thrush. This information tells you about thrush that develops in the vagina and on the male and female genitals.

What causes thrush to develop?

Your chances of developing thrush increase if you:

- Are pregnant.
- Wear tight clothing (such as tight jeans) or synthetic clothing (such as nylon underwear) that prevents ventilation.
- Are taking certain antibiotics.
- Are having chemotherapy.
- Have controlled diabetes, HIV or other illnesses that affect your immune system.
- Use products that may cause irritation of the vagina, such as vaginal deodorant or too much perfumed bubble bath.
- Have sex with someone who has thrush.

Stress may also be a factor for some women.

There is no evidence that hormone contraception causes thrush to develop.

How does sex cause thrush to develop?

Thrush can occasionally be passed on after vaginal, anal or oral sex, by using fingers during foreplay or by sharing sex toys.

This may be due to the yeast being transferred from one sexual partner to another or the act of intercourse irritating the vagina or genital area.

What is the treatment for thrush?

Treatment is simple for both men and women and is only necessary if you have signs and symptoms of thrush.

- You may be given some antifungal cream, pessaries, pills or a combination. The doctor or nurse will advise you how to use the treatment. The cream is applied to the genital area. A pessary is usually an almond-shaped tablet which a woman puts high up into her vagina.
- You can also buy some antifungal treatments from a pharmacy – these are useful if you are sure you have thrush and want to treat yourself. The pharmacist will be able to advise if you have any questions, or are unsure how to use the treatment.
- It is very important to take the treatment as instructed and finish any course of treatment even if the symptoms go away earlier.
- Some antifungal products can weaken latex condoms, diaphragms and caps. Polyurethane types can be safely used. Ask the doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice.
- Do tell the doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you are pregnant, or think you might be, or you are breastfeeding. This will affect the type of treatment that you are given.

- Some women find that complementary therapies, such as bathing the genital area with diluted tea tree oil gel or live plain yogurt, help relieve the symptoms of vaginal thrush.

How effective is the treatment?

- Antifungal cream, pessaries or pills are usually effective if you use them according to instructions. Symptoms should disappear within a few days.
- You may be advised to avoid sex during treatment. This may help the thrush clear up more quickly.
- If the first treatment doesn't work, the doctor or nurse may suggest another test or a combination of treatments.

Do I need to have a test to check that the thrush has gone?

No, this is not usually necessary. However, you may wish to go back to the doctor or nurse if:

- You did not use the treatment as instructed.
- The signs and symptoms did not go away.
- You think you may have thrush again.

Some situations seem to make my thrush worse, is there anything I can do?

Some women find different triggers cause vaginal thrush. If you notice a pattern, you may be able to help control it. For example:

- Avoid wearing tight, restrictive or synthetic clothing, such as tights, nylon underwear, leggings, Lycra shorts, and tight jeans or trousers.
- Avoid perfumed soap, bubble bath, genital sprays and deodorants, and any other irritants such as disinfectants and antiseptics.
- Make sure the vagina is well lubricated before sexual intercourse.
- Women should wash and wipe the genital area from front to back.
- If you are prescribed an antibiotic for another condition, remind your doctor that you tend to get thrush and ask for some treatment for thrush at the same time.

I get thrush regularly, is there anything that can help?

Some people may only get one episode of thrush – others may get repeat episodes. If you have four or more episodes of thrush in a year, this is known as recurrent thrush. If this happens, it is important to get medical advice and not treat yourself. If you get recurrent thrush the doctor or nurse:

- Will want to check that other conditions, such as diabetes, are not the cause of the thrush.
- May suggest that you take antifungal treatment on a regular basis.
- May check that the thrush is not being caused by a different kind of yeast.

Will help you try and identify any thrush triggers (see Some situations seem to make my thrush worse).