

Vaginal thrush

Advice on treatments for vaginal thrush

Thrush is a common yeast infection that affects men and women. It's usually harmless but it can be uncomfortable and keep coming back. It isn't classed as a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Thrush symptoms in women

- white discharge (like cottage cheese), which doesn't usually smell
- itching and irritation around the vagina
- soreness and stinging during sex or when you pee

See a GP or go to a sexual health clinic if:

- you have the symptoms of thrush for the first time
- you're under 16 or over 60
- your thrush keeps coming back (more than twice in 6 months)
- treatment hasn't worked
- you're pregnant or breastfeeding
- you have thrush and a weakened immune system – for example, because of diabetes, HIV or chemotherapy

Thrush in men

Thrush can also affect men. Thrush symptoms for men:

- irritation, burning and redness around the head of the penis and under the foreskin
- a white discharge (like cottage cheese)
- an unpleasant smell
- difficulty pulling back the foreskin

Sexual health clinics can help with thrush

Sexual health clinics treat problems with the genitals and urine system.

Many sexual health clinics offer a walk-in service, where you don't need an appointment. They'll often get test results quicker than GP practices.

It's important to get thrush in men diagnosed to rule out things like balanitis or a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

What happens at your appointment

Your GP or sexual health clinic will want to confirm it's thrush and rule out other infections.

You'll be asked about your symptoms. If it's not clear it's thrush:

- a doctor or nurse may look at your vagina or penis
- a cotton bud may be wiped over the discharge to test for other infections

Thrush treatment

You'll often need antifungal medicine to get rid of thrush. This can be a tablet you take, a tablet you insert into your vagina (pessary) or a cream to relieve the irritation.

Thrush should clear up within a week, after 1 dose of medicine or using the cream daily.

You don't need to treat partners, unless they have symptoms.

Recurring thrush

You might need to take treatment for longer (for up to 6 months) if you keep getting thrush (you get it more than twice in 6 months).

Your GP or sexual health clinic can help identify if something is causing your thrush, such as your period or sex. They'll recommend how often you should use treatment.

A pharmacist can help with thrush

You can buy antifungal medicine from pharmacies if you've had thrush diagnosed in the past and you know the symptoms.

A pharmacist can recommend the best treatment for you. Ask if they have a private area to talk if you're embarrassed.

You shouldn't use antifungal medicine more than twice in six months without speaking to a pharmacist or doctor.

Things you can do yourself to ease discomfort and prevent thrush returning

Do

- use water and emollient (instead of soap), like E45 cream, to wash your penis or vagina
- dry the affected area properly after washing

- wear cotton underwear
- avoid sex until thrush has cleared up
- use a condom to help stop it spreading
- take showers instead of baths

Don't

- use soaps or shower gels
- use douches or deodorants on your vagina or penis
- wear tight underwear or tights

What causes thrush

Thrush isn't classed as a sexually transmitted infection (STI) but it can be triggered by sex and sometimes passed on through sex.

Thrush is caused by a fungus called candida that is normally harmless. Thrush tends to grow in warm, moist conditions and develops if the balance of bacteria changes.

This can happen if:

- your skin is irritated or damaged
- you're taking antibiotics
- you have poorly controlled diabetes
- you have a weakened immune system, for example because of HIV or chemotherapy
- you've been through the menopause
- you're pregnant

More information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/video/Pages/Thrush.aspx>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/thrush-in-men-and-women/>