

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a condition occurring in women where the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is disrupted.

What are the symptoms of bacterial vaginosis?

- a white-grey vaginal discharge which may have a “fishy” odour
- abnormal discharge which may be more noticeable during menstruation and after sex
- vulval or vaginal irritation or soreness.

What causes bacterial vaginosis?

The cause of BV is not fully understood. The vagina contains a range of bacteria which help keep the vagina healthy. BV develops when there is a change in the balance of bacteria in the vagina.

Who gets bacterial vaginosis and how common is it?

Sexually active women are more likely to develop BV. It is unknown if BV is transmitted through sex, or whether sexual activity causes BV by disturbing the vaginal balance. Studies show that douching (washing high inside the vagina), having a new sexual partner, not using condoms, or having a female partner have all been linked to BV. BV can also be present at the same time as sexually transmitted infections.

How is bacterial vaginosis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on symptoms, clinical signs and laboratory testing. To accurately diagnose BV, your practitioner may insert a speculum into the vagina. A speculum is a device used to hold the walls of the vagina apart so that the cervix and vagina can be examined and a sample can be collected. To collect a sample a cotton swab is inserted into the vagina, a small amount of discharge is removed, and then examined under a microscope.

What is the treatment for bacterial vaginosis?

BV will sometimes clear up without treatment, however treatment is recommended for:

- women with symptoms
- women having some gynaecological procedures such as a termination of pregnancy
- pregnant women

BV is treated with either oral antibiotic tablets or a vaginal antibiotic cream for 7 days. BV can reoccur if not treated properly.

What can happen if bacterial vaginosis is not treated?

50% of women with BV do not have any symptoms and for the majority of these

women BV may not need any treatment. In most cases, if left untreated BV causes no complications.

However BV may cause more serious complications in the following situations:

- in pregnant women BV has been associated with miscarriage, premature delivery and low birth weight of infants
- it has been suggested BV may contribute to pelvic inflammatory disease but the evidence is not consistent.

How can I prevent bacterial vaginosis?

BV is not completely understood and the best ways to prevent it are unknown. However, the following should be avoided:

- douching
- use of bath oils, detergents, bubble bath
- excessive washing of the genitals with soaps and body wash.

Will bacterial vaginosis come back again?

Some women will experience recurrent episodes and require further antibiotic treatment.

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