

Candidiasis

Candidiasis (also called ‘thrush’) is a common condition which can affect both men and women.

What are the symptoms of candidiasis?

Women

- vulval and/or vaginal itching, soreness, burning and swelling
- white or yellow vaginal discharge
- painful sex, especially on penetration.

Men

- irritation and rash on the glans penis (head of the penis)
- swollen foreskin.

Both

- stinging on passing urine
- redness of the skin
- skin splits, cracks or shallow ulcers
- a rash which may be present away from the genitals e.g. on the inner thigh

These symptoms also occur with other conditions including allergy, skin irritation, genital herpes and other infections, so it is important to have the right diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

What causes candidiasis?

The yeast that causes candidiasis normally lives in the vagina and does not cause any problems. Certain factors cause yeasts to grow more than usual and when that happens, symptoms can appear.

Risk factors that may increase genital candidiasis occurring include:

- pregnancy
- poorly controlled diabetes (high blood sugar levels)
- taking antibiotics
- a weakened immune system

How is candidiasis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on symptoms, signs and laboratory testing. To accurately diagnose candidiasis in women, your practitioner may advise examination of the vagina using a speculum. A speculum is a device used to hold the walls of the vagina apart so that the cervix and vaginal walls can be examined and a sample of the discharge can be collected using a cotton swab. In men, the glans penis is swabbed with a cotton swab.

What is the treatment for candidiasis?

There are several treatment choices. For women, treatment includes oral tablets, or tablets or creams to insert into the vagina. For men, creams are used to apply directly to the affected skin.

Creams may damage latex so should be avoided if using condoms or diaphragms. Oral treatments must be avoided in pregnancy and breastfeeding

A note on self treatment

Do not assume that your symptoms are caused by candidiasis. Many people self-treat which may make symptoms worse. It is best to see a health professional to have a check up if you have unusual genital symptoms.

Who gets candidiasis and how common is it?

Candidiasis occurs mainly in women of reproductive age. It is less common in postmenopausal women who do not take oestrogen and is rare in girls who have not yet started menstruating (getting periods). Infections can also occur in men who are not circumcised.

What can happen if candidiasis is not treated?

There are usually no complications if candidiasis is left untreated, but the symptoms may worsen.

Is it safe to have sex with candidiasis?

If it is not too uncomfortable, it is safe to have sex if you have candidiasis. It is possible for Candida infections to be passed on through sex, although this is uncommon. Sexual partners with symptoms should see a health professional and only have treatment if candidiasis is present.

Will candidiasis come back again?

Some women have recurrent candidiasis. If this is happening to you more than 4 times a year then it is a good idea to see a health care professional as a different treatment may be needed. Recurrent candidiasis is uncommon in men.

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