



Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a condition that can happen when the normal balance of bacteria in your vagina is disrupted.

What are the symptoms of bacterial vaginosis?

- A white-grey vaginal discharge which may have a “fishy” smell.
- Abnormal discharge which may be more noticeable during your period 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 it 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?

You are more likely to develop BV if you are sexually active. We don't know if BV is transmitted through sex, or whether sexual activity causes BV by disturbing the vaginal balance. Studies show that douching (washing high inside your 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 health professional may take a swab. To do this, they will put a speculum into your vagina. A speculum is a device used to hold the walls of your vagina apart so your cervix and vagina can be examined, and a swab sample collected. The swab collects a small amount of discharge which is examined under a microscope. Swabs may also be sent to a pathology lab for confirmation.

When is treatment needed?

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

- you have symptoms
- you are having a gynaecological procedure like a termination of pregnancy
- you are pregnant.

BV is treated with either antibiotic tablets or a vaginal antibiotic cream for 7 days.

What can happen if bacterial vaginosis is not treated?

For some people, BV may cause more serious complications. It has been associated with miscarriage, premature delivery and low birth weight of babies. It has also been suggested



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that BV may contribute to pelvic inflammatory disease, but evidence about this is not consistent.

50% of people with BV do not have any symptoms. Many people will not need any treatment. In most cases, if left untreated BV causes no complications.

How can I prevent bacterial vaginosis?

BV is not completely understood and the best ways to prevent it are unknown. However, you can help by **not**:

- douching
- using bath oils, bath soaps such as bubble bath
- washing your genitals too much with soaps and body wash.

Will bacterial vaginosis come back again?

You may have more episodes of BV. If this happens you may need more antibiotic treatment. You should see your GP or sexual health clinic who will check whether you need more treatment.

If you need more information or have any questions, please contact the Canberra Sexual Health Clinic on (02) 5124 2184.

References:

British Association of Sexual Health and HIV (2012) UK National Guideline for the Management of Bacterial Vaginosis. <http://www.bashh.org/documents/4413.pdf>

Victorian Sexual Health Network (2020) Bacterial Vaginosis Fact Sheet. <https://www.staystifree.org.au/get-the-facts/bacterial-vaginosis>

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USA Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) Fact Sheet <http://www.cdc.gov/std/bv/stdfact-bacterial-vaginosis.htm>

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