

## Department of Genitourinary Medicine

# Patient Information



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# Information

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## Recurrent vaginal candidiasis (thrush)

Candidiasis, also known as thrush, is a common yeast or fungal infection. It can affect the vagina, penis, or mouth. Most people harbour the yeast without it causing them any problems; however if conditions change and it overgrows, it can cause symptoms. Some women are troubled by recurrent infections of the vagina.

### What is candidiasis?

*Candida albicans*, the commonest cause of thrush, is a fungus or yeast. It is a normal inhabitant of the body, found in the mouth, bowels, and vagina. It usually only causes problems when a change in the environment of the vagina has upset the normal balance. This allows the *Candida* to overgrow, resulting in candidiasis or thrush. Most women suffer from the occasional episode of candidiasis, but some women are troubled by recurrent infections.

### What causes candidiasis?

Common triggers are:

- antibiotics; these upset the balance of the vagina by killing off the healthy bacteria.
- overheating; e.g. from wearing tights or leggings
- irritants, such as bath additives
- trauma; this includes intercourse
- hormonal changes; it is common for candidiasis to be troublesome before a period or during pregnancy.
- some medical conditions, such as diabetes

Often no cause is found for recurrent infections.

### What are the symptoms of candidiasis?

One or all of:

- itching of the vulva
- soreness or burning of the vulva or vagina
- burning on passing urine
- discharge - often white and lumpy (like cottage cheese)
- pain on intercourse

It is thought that symptoms may result from a woman developing a sensitivity or allergy to the *Candida*, as it is often found in the vagina without causing any problems at all.

## How is candidiasis diagnosed?

- It is important to confirm the diagnosis as other conditions can cause the same symptoms.
- You will need an examination to exclude skin conditions such as dermatitis which can cause similar symptoms, and swabs will be taken from the vagina.
- Swabs may have to be taken on several occasions as *Candida* often comes and goes.

## How is recurrent candidiasis treated?

### Self help:

- If you need a course of antibiotics, ask for antifungal treatment to be prescribed at the same time.
- Avoid wearing tights and tight trousers. Wear stockings or hold-ups and keep your knickers off as much as possible.
- Avoid bath additives and scented soaps
- Use extra lubrication during intercourse
- Some women find live natural yoghurt or tea tree oil helpful and soothing.

### Medical treatment:

As *Candida* is a normal inhabitant of the body, there is no treatment which will get rid of it forever. However it can be controlled with suppressive treatment and your body usually re-establishes its own balance in time.

Suppressive treatment consists of antifungal oral capsules (eg fluconazole) or vaginal pessaries (eg clotrimazole), taken on a regular basis to prevent (rather than treat) symptoms. They are usually given weekly to start with, and may need to be prescribed for 6 to 12 months or longer.

## Common myths

- “*My partner and I keep passing thrush back and forth between us*”. Women can pass the infection to their sexual partners, but are unlikely to be re-infected by them. Treating male partners has not been shown to reduce the frequency of recurrent vaginal thrush. If symptoms occur after intercourse, it is usually because of the friction triggering off the overgrowth of *Candida* that was already present.
- “*You shouldn’t eat foods that contain yeasts*”. The yeasts found in foods such as bread are a completely different type from those that cause thrush. There is no evidence that any other dietary restrictions or special diets will prevent thrush. Eating a balanced healthy diet is the best way of improving your immune system.

## Where can I obtain treatment?

- Antifungal capsules and pessaries can be bought over the counter (without a prescription) from pharmacies. It is best that the diagnosis is confirmed before treating yourself.
- Your General Practitioner can provide you with a prescription for treatment.

- Expert advice and treatment may also be obtained from:

The Department of Genitourinary Medicine  
The Park Centre for Sexual Health  
Weymouth Community Hospital  
Melcombe Avenue  
Weymouth  
DT4 7TB

To book an appointment, please call:

01305 762682