

## A Candid Look into Yeast Infections

What may arguably be the most commonly known yeast infection or form of candidiasis in the world today is thrush, which affects mostly female genitalia. (It is rare, though not impossible, for men to contract the disease.) But yeast infections actually do not limit themselves to either gender, and simply affect certain areas of the human body.

Yeast infections are infections confined specifically to the skin or mucous-like membrane, caused in human beings by a genus of fungi called *Candida*. It appears in laboratory-cultured agar plates as large, round colonies colored white, cream or whitish-gray. One of its most famous (or rather infamous) species is *Candida albicans*, though it must be noted that *Candida albicans* is not the only species that causes yeast infections in human beings.

*Candida albicans* lives peacefully with other flora in the human body, its growth kept in check by a certain bacteria. It makes its home inside the dark, warm, wet areas of the body. This is why yeast infections are found in areas such as the ears, the mouth, the blood, the gastrointestinal or "gut" area - and yes, the area "down there." However, it also likes human skin, particularly warm, wet sections which like skin folds and armpits.

Candidiasis is also called "yeast infection" is because *Candida albicans*' normal form is that of single oval yeast cells. When in yeast form, it duplicates itself through budding. This means the cells create genetic clones of themselves through bulbs that "grow" out of them. These bulbs stay attached to the parent cells for a while before letting go.

So what actually causes yeast infection? First, the human body's temperature must be at a specific level and the pH levels must be balanced, two of the conditions necessary for *Candida albicans* and its partner bacteria to grow without disturbing other flora. But when the temperature and pH levels change, these bacteria die. This leaves the *Candida albicans* cells free to change into fungi and to replicate with no control over themselves.

*Candida albicans* fungi mark their territories during this population boom by causing any of these sensations: burning, itching, soreness, or tingling. Sometimes, two of these sensations can be felt at once. It's a bad idea to scratch the irritated areas, since this act would only compound the overgrowth of the fungi.

Other signs include fatigue, drowsiness, muscle aches, pain or swelling in the joints, dizziness, fluid retention, tissue swelling, loss of balance, lack of

coordination, lack of concentration, poor memory, mood swings, depression, anxiety, irritability, and cravings for sugars, carbohydrates and alcohol. But these are also common symptoms for other sicknesses, so they must be taken into consideration along with more reliable indicators.

The overgrowth also causes specific side-effects in afflicted areas. To name a few, yeast infections create white-or cream-colored patches inside the mouth, reaching as far as the soft palate. They cause digestion problems and make even bowel movement difficult. Afflicted penises have patchy sores near the head or on the foreskin. Candidiasis is also responsible for discharges from the ear, the bowels (in the stool) and the genitalia.

Yeast infections can cause serious, sometimes even fatal, diseases. This is particularly true for sufferers with weakened or underdeveloped immune systems, diabetes, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). However, sufferers can be permanently cured through immediate and proper diagnosis and medication.