

Got Yeast? A Guide to Diagnosing Yeast Infection in Women

The female human body is an organic machine made of nerve, muscle and bone. It can nurture babies for up to nine months. But, like all machines, it is prone to the occasional malfunction, such as, well, getting candidiasis - better known as a yeast infection, or in this case vaginal thrush. So how do you go about diagnosing yeast infection?

Not Quite Yeast, Actually...

To begin, vaginal thrush is not brought about by yeast. The infection is actually caused by a fungus called *Candida albicans* which has yeast-like properties. It grows naturally in warm, moist, dark regions of the body, like the mouth and the vagina. Its growth is kept checked by a kind of beneficial bacteria which also grows in the human body. The job of *Candida albicans* is to search for harmful bacteria and destroy them.

The problem starts when the good bacteria that monitor the growth of *Candida albicans* die, either because of antibiotics or a weak immune system. Once these bacteria die, *Candida albicans* grow rapidly and spread aggressively. Add to this the fact that all candida fungi can pass through muscle or organ walls in the body (it has been known to penetrate intestinal walls), and there you have it - an infection that irritates the vagina as well as the vulva.

So How Do You Diagnose It, Really?

The first step to determine the symptoms. The most telling symptom is if your body releases a white or whitish-gray discharge which comes out clumpy and has a smell that reminds you of bread or beer. Other common warning signs include severe itching, a burning and tingling sensation, and even soreness, all of which make walking, switching positions, urinating and sexual intercourse difficult. Some of these symptoms may be heightened through exposure to chemicals, such as perfumes and household cleaning materials.

Sufferers are also more prone to develop allergies through inhaling airborne mold. Damp, dark locations can make them feel worse. They may also display a craving for sugar, breads, carbohydrates and alcohol, though sufferers may not necessarily be tolerant to alcohol. But even then these symptoms altogether may make you a candidate for another infection called bacterial vaginosis, which merits its own article.

With these symptoms in mind, the next step is to visit your obstetrician-gynecologist or ob-gyne. The ob-gyne will begin questioning you about your

symptoms, your medical history and your exposure to certain chemicals. He or she will take a swab of your vaginal discharge, and inspect the presence of candida from this sample under a microscope. The ob-gyne may also ask you to assist him or her in identifying the exact location of the itching or pain using a magnifying lens.

Keep in mind that not all doctors are able to diagnose thrush or yeast infections properly. There are times that the indicators could be signs of thrush as described here, and there are times that they may actually be symptoms of a kind of vaginitis, most likely bacterial in nature. Also, when left unchecked, thrush may cause dangerous side-effects, such as endometriosis, ovarian dysfunction and the release of toxins which may further jeopardize your immune system.

Diagnosing yeast infection can be difficult, mostly because its symptoms are no different with those of other illnesses affecting the genital region. Therefore, it is extremely important to be pro-active in getting an accurate diagnosis as soon as you experience the warning signs.

You must be able to recognize and keep track of what is going on with you in your genital region. And you must be very forthcoming when asked about the medication you are taking and the products you are using.