

---

## ◆ BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS ◆

---

Bacterial vaginosis is a very common problem for women. It results from an imbalance in the bacteria population in the vagina, with a loss of the normal, healthy bacteria (Lactobacilli) and an overgrowth of anaerobic bacteria (Gardnerella, Atopobium and other species). The bacterial imbalance is also associated with the vagina becoming less acidic than normal.

What exactly causes this all to happen is still not clear, but some of the risk factors that make bacterial vaginosis more likely to happen are:

- ▶ being sexually active (semen is alkaline and this may have something to do with causing the problem, so using condoms may help stop the infection happening).
- ▶ having a new sexual partner.
- ▶ vaginal douching.
- ▶ low vitamin D levels also seem to be a risk.

Bacterial vaginosis is not a sexually transmitted disease, but an active infection will make you more likely to catch sexually transmitted illnesses such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea and herpes.

There is no equivalent problem in men, and there is no point in treating your male partner. However, bacterial vaginosis does seem to be more common in women who have sex with women, and in this circumstance it appears that it might be passed from one woman to another.

### ● Symptoms

Most women with bacterial vaginosis complain of:

- ▶ a slightly watery vaginal discharge that is often greyish, but can be white or yellow.
- ▶ a strong odour (often described as a 'fishy' or 'stale' smell), which is more evident after sex and at the time of a period.

### ● Diagnosis

Your doctor may decide to offer you treatment based purely on your symptoms, but may also test the pH (acid level) of the vaginal secretions and send a vaginal swab for examination.

### ● Treatment

When the infection is found to be present in women who have no symptoms, then no treatment may be needed, as the problem can tend to come and go naturally. However, many women are anxious to have everything back to normal, and bacterial vaginosis becomes a real issue for women who wish to have an IUD (intrauterine contraceptive) inserted, or who are having surgery such as a termination of pregnancy or a hysterectomy. In pregnancy, bacterial vaginosis can increase the risk of miscarriage or premature birth.

Treatment options include:

- ▶ Oral antibiotics- Metronidazole tablets (Flagyl®), Tinidazole tablets (Fasigyn®)  
Clindamycin capsules (Dalacin®)
- ▶ Vaginal antibiotics- Metronidazole gel (Zidoval®), Clindamycin cream (Dalacin V®)
- ▶ Vaginal acidifiers- Aci-Jel® gel, VagiCare® pessaries (these will not usually treat an active infection, but may prevent the recurrence of an infection).
- ▶ Probiotics may also be helpful, but there is no clear evidence for their effectiveness.

### ● Recurrence

Unfortunately, some women experience repeated episodes of bacterial vaginosis. As mentioned above, using vaginal acidifiers seems to help prevent the infection coming back, particularly if started after finishing a course of antibiotic treatment. Using sanitary pads and avoiding the use of tampons for one or two period cycles after treatment may also be helpful in stopping the problem from returning.

June 2011