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What is considered a "normal" vaginal discharge?

All women have a normal vaginal discharge called "leukorrhea." The amount and consistency varies with each individual. However, it is generally a mucous like consistency and tends to increase the two weeks before menstruation. The amount of discharge may also vary based upon the method of birth control being used. A normal vaginal discharge may vary slightly in color, although it is usually clear or white and has no unpleasant odor. It should not be itchy or irritating to the body in any way.

Are there any recommendations for preventing vaginal infections?

1. Personal hygiene and cleanliness are your first line of defense against vaginal infections. Keep clean by bathing with mild soap and water. However, vigorous scrubbing of the genital area is NOT necessary and maybe irritating.
2. Avoid vaginal douches.
 - ◆ Douching can be harmful if done when an infection is present. The pressure of the douche solution may cause the infection to spread into the uterus and become even worse.
 - ◆ The douche solution actually removes the natural secretions of the vagina that help maintain a protective environment against infections.
 - ◆ Douching with various commercial products may aggravate existing conditions or set up a "chemical vaginitis" (inflammation of the vagina caused by irritation from the chemicals in the douche).
 - ◆ Be sure not to douche for at least three days prior to a medical appointment, as this washes out discharges and will not allow the practitioner to get a true picture of your condition. This could also prevent laboratory tests from being accurate. If for some reason you do need a douche, your practitioner will recommend one to you.
3. Avoid use of feminine hygiene sprays, deodorants, and deodorant tampons.
 - ◆ Vaginal deodorants can be irritating and are worthless in preventing or treating an infection.
 - ◆ Commercial feminine hygiene products tend to alter environment of the vagina and make the vagina more vulnerable to irritation and infection.
4. Wear sensible clothing, including cotton underwear. Avoid thongs. Pants should not be tight or binding in the crotch. Wearing no underwear while sleeping can allow better ventilation around the vaginal area for a period of time each day.
5. Change your tampons or sanitary napkins frequently, each time you urinate or have a bowel movement.
6. Always wipe yourself with toilet paper from front to back after going to the bathroom. This helps to avoid contamination of the vaginal area from the rectal area.
7. Try to urinate following sexual intercourse or genital stimulation. This helps to cleanse the vaginal area and drain the bladder.
8. Use a condom when having sex. - Keep this in mind as a general rule of safe sex. Condoms will protect you from many sexually transmitted diseases and that's great for such a simple, inexpensive device!



What are some good rules to follow if I do get a vaginal infection?

1. Take the entire course of medication exactly as prescribed. If you do not, the infection can "go underground" temporarily and then return, maybe leaving you with a worse infection than before. It is a common misconception that one can discontinue taking a prescription once symptoms have resolved. This is not true. When treating infections, it is crucial that every last bit of medicine be used.
2. If you are inserting vaginal cream or suppositories, remain lying down in bed for at least 15 minutes after insertion to allow the medication to spread deeply in the vagina where it is needed.
3. Do not use tampons when using a vaginal medication. Tampons can absorb the medication and reduce its effect-



tiveness. Use pads or panty liners to prevent staining of your underwear.

4. If you have a vaginal infection and use a diaphragm, soak the diaphragm for 30 minutes in Betadine scrub (not solution) or 70% rubbing alcohol after using the prescribed medication for two days. Then, repeat this soaking process one more time when you have completed your prescription.

Is it all right to have sex if I have a vaginal infection?

Sexual relations should be avoided throughout the entire course of treatment or for at least one week if you have an infection. Intercourse can be very irritating to the inflamed vagina and cervix during an infection and it can slow down the healing process. Also, the germs that are causing your infection might spread to your partner.



For answers to more specific questions or to make an appointment for an exam, call the Women's Clinic at 486-4837.

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