

# Vaginal Discharge

## Description:

*Unusual vaginal discharge may be a sign of an infection. Some of these can be serious. Some may cause problems later in life if they are not treated.*

## Do's

If you are concerned about any vaginal discharge or have some other concern about your health, you should see your doctor, family planning clinic or sexual health clinic.

## Practical Advice

What is normal?

- In young girls before the age of puberty: - any vaginal discharge should be discussed with your doctor, clinic nurse or health worker - bacteria from the bowel can cause infection in the vagina of young girls - poor hygiene, pinworms and something put inside the vagina can all cause irritation and discharge - sexually abused girls can also develop sexually transmitted infections of the vagina causing discharge.
- After puberty: - vaginal secretions are produced normally due to the female hormone oestrogen, - a range of bacteria are normally present in the vaginal secretions - the amount of discharge normal women produce varies from woman to woman - the amount of discharge is different at different stages of the menstrual cycle: - just before and just after the period, the discharge may be thicker and white - in the middle of the cycle, around the time of ovulation, there may be more discharge and it is usually clear and runny like egg white - women on the oral contraceptive pill may notice less discharge - the smell of normal vaginal discharge may change, although it is not normally offensive - general health and well-being may affect the amount and quality of discharge.
- After menopause: - oestrogen is no longer produced - the lining of the vagina and the skin around the outside of the vagina become thinner - there are less vaginal secretions - the vagina can become quite dry - replacement oestrogen, called hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can reverse these changes.

Abnormal vaginal discharge may include:

- an unusual increase in the amount of discharge
- an unusual and unpleasant smell
- an unusual yellow or green colour
- a discharge which is accompanied by itching, irritation or vulval swelling and pain.

Causes of abnormal vaginal discharge may include:

- Infection: - Thrush (Candidiasis) - often thick white discharge, usually itchy - Trichomonas - may be a fishy smell - Bacterial vaginosis - Chlamydia -Gonorrhoea
- tampon left in too long
- something put into vagina and left there (eg. broken condom)
- allergy to: - latex (condoms) - medicated vaginal creams such as those used to treat thrush
- irritation caused by: - douching agents - soaps, detergents - spermicides
- Toxic shock syndrome: this has been associated with tampon use and is fortunately uncommon. Women with toxic shock syndrome are usually quite unwell and have a high fever.

## Other Resources

[Queensland Health - Sexual Health website](#)

## Related Content

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Thrush (Candidiasis) fact sheet

Trichomonas fact sheet

Bacterial Vaginosis fact sheet

Chlamydia fact sheet

Gonorrhoea fact sheet

Safe Sex fact sheet