

Vaginal Discharge Fact Sheet

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- ❖ **What is** vaginal discharge?
- ❖ What **causes** normal vaginal discharge?
- ❖ Is vaginal discharge always **normal**?
- ❖ Are there **tests** for vaginal discharge?
- ❖ How is vaginal discharge **treated**?
- ❖ When should a woman see a **health care provider** about vaginal discharge?

SOURCES:

National Institutes of Health

- ❖ [Vaginal discharge](#)

Cleveland Clinic

- ❖ [Vaginitis](#)
- ❖ [Vaginal discharge](#)

Mayo Clinic

- ❖ [Vaginal discharge](#)

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

- ❖ [Vaginitis](#)

[No author listed] Information from your family doctor. Vaginal discharge. *Am Fam Physician*. 2004 May 1;69(9):2191-2.

What is vaginal discharge?

- ❖ Vaginal discharge is fluid that comes out of the vagina. It is usually clear or white.
- ❖ Most women have discharge sometimes. Some women have discharge every day. Other women only have discharge once in a while.
- ❖ If the discharge changes color, smells different, or gets heavier, then you may have a problem like an infection.

Is vaginal discharge always normal?

- ❖ If a woman has more vaginal discharge, it could be due to menopause or cancer (rare).
- ❖ If you have discharge plus itching or burning near the vagina, then you may have vaginitis (va-gin-EYE-tis).
- ❖ Vaginitis happens when the vagina gets irritated (inflamed)
- ❖ Signs of vaginitis:
 - Increased discharge.
 - A strong odor.
 - Green, yellow, or gray color.
 - Itching.
 - Pain.
 - Redness around the opening of the vagina.
- ❖ Vaginitis can be caused by chemicals that could be in creams, liquids, sprays, or clothing that touch the area around the vagina.
- ❖ Vaginitis can also be due to an infection. In some cases, the infection is caused by germs that are passed during sex. Gonorrhea and chlamydia are sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that can cause discharge.
- ❖ Other infections are not spread during sex. Infections happen when there are too many of the yeast and bacteria (germs) that normally live in the vagina.
 - Bacterial vaginosis and yeast infections are infections not spread during sex.

Are there tests for vaginal discharge?

- ❖ If you have a change in vaginal discharge, tests may help figure out the problem.
- ❖ Possible tests include:
 - Pelvic exam—the health care provider looks at the vagina and cervix (the part of the uterus at the top of the vagina).
 - pH test—the health care provider checks the acid level of the discharge.



- Pap smear—during the pelvic exam, the health care provider takes a sample to check for cell changes and cancer.
- Wet mount – sample of discharge is examined under the microscope to check for infection
- Culture of the discharge—a sample is taken from the vagina to check for infection.



How is vaginal discharge treated?

- ❖ Normal vaginal discharge doesn't need treatment. Some women douche to remove vaginal discharge that is actually healthy. This is not a good idea. Using a douche washes away the healthy bacteria in the vagina and can cause other health problems. The healthy bacteria prevent other infections.
- ❖ Treatment of abnormal discharge depends on the problem.
- ❖ Infections are treated with medicines to kill bacteria (called antibiotics) or to kill yeast. If you have an STI, your sexual partners need to be treated too. If medication is given to treat an infection, it is important to finish all medication, even if symptoms get better before you finish the medication.
- ❖ Vaginitis due to menopause can be treated with vaginal cream that contains estrogen.
- ❖ Vaginitis caused by chemicals is treated by avoiding certain products. Products that can irritate the vagina include:
 - Feminine hygiene sprays.
 - Colored or perfumed toilet paper.
 - Sanitary pads or tampons that contain a deodorant.
 - Bubble bath.
 - Laundry detergent.
 - Fabric softener.



When should a woman see a health care provider about vaginal discharge?

- ❖ You should see a health care provider if you have:
 - More discharge than usual.
 - Thick, white discharge.
 - Green or yellow discharge.
 - Strong odor.
 - Itching or pain around the vagina.
 - Pain in the pelvic (lower belly) area.
 - Pain with intercourse (sex).

