

Vaginitis

Vaginitis is an inflammation of the vagina, or internal genitals. Vaginitis has many causes, including some sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Two other types of vaginitis include: atrophic vaginitis and vulvodynia.

Atrophic vaginitis is an irritation of the vagina/internal genitals caused by thinning tissues and less moisture in the vaginal walls. This often occurs in menopause because lower amounts of the hormone estrogen are produced by the body.

Vulvodynia is a chronic pain syndrome that has no known cause. The pain usually occurs in the vulva, but can also be in the opening to the vagina/internal genitals.

Vaginitis that is caused by an infection can usually be cured with antibiotics..

Causes

Vaginitis is most often caused by yeast, bacterial vaginosis, or Trichomoniasis. Vaginitis can also be caused by other bacteria, or by reactions to chemical irritants, douches, or vaginal creams.

Symptoms

Symptoms of vaginitis may include:

- irritation or itching of the vagina/internal genitals and the genital area
- redness, pain, and swelling of genital area
- abnormal vaginal discharge
- abnormal vaginal odour
- pain during sex
- pain with urination

**Note: if you have had lower surgery, your genital symptoms may vary*

Tests and Diagnosis

Testing for vaginitis is usually done with an exam and a swab sample. It is best to get tested for vaginitis if you have symptoms, or you have a partner who has been diagnosed with vaginitis.

Treatment

Treatment for vaginitis depends on the cause. If the vaginitis is caused by an STI, your health provider may give you antibiotics or antivirals to treat the infection. Atrophic vaginitis can be treated with prescription estrogen cream.

Sexual Partners

Your sexual partners within the last two months should be tested and treated for STIs. If you haven't had sex in the last two months, your last partner should be tested.

Prevention

There are a number of things you can do to prevent vaginitis:

- use unscented soaps or no soap on the genitals
- avoid harsh laundry detergents and use a double rinse cycle
- wear loose clothing and cotton underwear
- avoid over-use of antibiotics
- avoid douching, genital deodorant sprays, and scented sanitary products
- use an unscented, glycerin-free lube

It is a good idea to be tested regularly for STIs, especially if you have new sexual partners or open relationships. Talking with partners about safer sex makes sure everyone knows what to expect. Condoms are great if they work for you – the correct use of condoms reduces your chances of getting and passing the infections that can cause vaginitis.

Resources

SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about vaginitis

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>