

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

What is BV and what causes it?

- Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is the most common vaginal infection
- BV is an infection caused by the presence of abnormal bacteria in the vagina
- The healthy vagina should have a large amount of good bacteria called lactobacilli.
- The good bacteria make hydrogen peroxide which keeps the healthy vagina acidic.
- BV is present when abnormal bacteria that are not supposed to be in the vagina replace the good bacteria
- Douching may double the risk of BV
- A BV is not sexually transmitted and generally there is no need to treat a woman's sexual partner.
- BV is sexually associated which means that there is more risk of getting BV when women have intercourse without the use of condoms.
- The presence of semen in the vagina allows the abnormal bacteria to grow more easily.
- A Research has shown that it is important to treat BV even in women who have no symptoms.
- Women with BV are more easily infected by other sexually transmitted infections that a partner may have.
- There are also risks to pregnancy when a woman has BV.

Signs and Symptoms of Bacterial Vaginosis

- When BV is present there is a range of symptoms from absent or no symptoms to abnormal discharge and an odor typically described as fishy.
- Odor tends to be increased with intercourse, if there is semen in the vagina and may be increased with the menstrual period.
- A There is increased or different vaginal discharge that is thin, or creamy and white to gray in color.
- It is unusual to have itching or irritation of the genital skin with BV.

Diagnosis of Bacterial Vaginosis

- The diagnosis is made during an office visit with your health care practitioner.
- In the exam room a test of the acid/base level (pH) of the vagina may be done.
- This pH testing is very helpful because the normal acidity of the vagina is gone when the abnormal bacteria are present and the protective bacteria are not present.
- Vaginal discharge may be placed onto glass slides with solutions for microscopic examination
- The classic odor of BV may become stronger on one of the glass slides.
- This is called a positive “whiff test”
- There is no use for cultures in diagnosing BV.
- The practitioner will look for specific BV findings under the microscope. This includes the absence of protective bacteria and the presence of “clue cells”.

Treatment of Bacterial Vaginosis

- The treatment of BV is by antibiotic medication taken as a pill or inserted into the vagina.
- Women who have problems with repeated episodes of infection (recurrent infection) should be treated for longer than the usual length of treatment.

Follow-Up Visits

- Follow-up visits are not necessary in most women, unless there is a history of repeated infections

Recurrent bacterial vaginosis

- Up to 30% of patients find that the BV is back again within 3 months of treatment.
- Avoid douching which can increase the risk of recurrent infection.
- It is helpful to use condoms and avoid vaginal exposure to semen for one month after treatment even in long term relationships where condoms are not being used.
- Studies have shown benefit in continuing medication for three to six months for the prevention of recurrent infection in select women.
- If you have had many BV infections, you may want to discuss long term preventative treatment with your practitioner