



# Bacterial Vaginosis

## What is bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a common vaginal condition in which some of the bacteria normally found in small amounts in the vagina begin to increase in numbers rapidly. This interrupts the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina. BV is the most common vaginal infection. BV in pregnancy is a possible cause of miscarriage. In nonpregnant women, it may play a role in infertility.

## What causes BV?

How women get BV is not fully understood. It does not appear to be a sexually transmitted condition and can occur in any woman, even if she is not sexually active. Women with many sex partners or a new sex partner may be more prone to it. Women who douche are also more likely to get BV. Cigarette smoking may also make you more susceptible to BV. It is not spread by bedding, toilet seats, swimming pools or other objects.

## What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom is a milky white or grayish discharge from the vagina, which often has a fishy odor, which may be especially noticeable after intercourse. You may also have itching around the opening of the vagina and experience a feeling of constant moisture or wetness. Some women experience some burning or discomfort.

The bacteria associated with bacterial vaginosis are sometimes found in the tips of men's penises. However, men do not usually have any symptoms and it is difficult to diagnose in men.

## What complications can BV cause?

Complications from BV are rare. However, a woman with BV may have the following complications:

- Increased risk of contracting HIV if a she is exposed to it during intercourse
- Increased risk of passing HIV to her partner
- Increased risk of infection following female surgery like abortion or hysterectomy
- Increased risk of miscarriage or preterm delivery during pregnancy
- Increased risk of other STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) like herpes or gonorrhea.
- Increased risk of infertility from infection of the uterus and tubes.

## How is BV diagnosed?



Your doctor or nurse midwife/nurse practitioner will do a pelvic exam and get a sample of vaginal discharge. The discharge has a distinctive appearance under a microscope and also causes a change in vaginal pH (how acid the vaginal secretions are). It also has a strong fishy odor when mixed with certain chemicals in the lab.

## How is BV treated?

BV is generally treated with a medication called Metronidazole. This medication may be taken by mouth or as a vaginal cream. There are other medications that can also be effective if you are allergic to Metronidazole. If you keep getting BV after treatment, your doctor or nurse midwife/nurse practitioner may recommend treating your partner too. It is especially important to get treatment if you are pregnant.

## How long will the effects last?

The symptoms usually go away within a few days after you start treatment.

## What can be done to help prevent bacterial vaginosis?

Because the cause is not known, there is no way to prevent it. However, the following may help:

- Use condoms, especially during treatment
- Complete the course of treatment, even if your symptoms seem improved
- Avoid intercourse if your partner has symptoms of infection: sores, rashes, discharge, or burning
- Keep the skin of your vaginal area clean and dry
- After toilet use, always wipe front to back to keep bacteria from your rectum away from your vagina
- Use only water-based lubricants. Avoid Vaseline and other oil-based products which encourage bacteria around the vagina
- Avoid vaginal products containing deodorant or perfume
- Avoid douching as this removes some of the normal bacteria that prevent infection in your vagina.

Male Condom

