



Patient education: Vulvovaginal yeast infection (The Basics)

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What is a vulvovaginal yeast infection?

A vulvovaginal yeast infection is an infection that causes itching and irritation of the vulva, the outer lips of the vagina ([figure 1](#)). This type of infection is usually caused by a fungus called "candida." (Yeast are a type of fungus.)

What are the symptoms of a yeast infection?

Symptoms include:

- Itching of the vulva (this is the most common symptom)
- Pain, redness, or irritation of the vulva and vagina
- Pain when you urinate
- Pain during sex
- Abnormal vaginal discharge, which might be thick and white or thin and watery

How do I know if my symptoms are caused by a yeast infection?

Most people cannot tell whether they have a yeast infection or something else. The symptoms of a yeast infection are a lot like the symptoms of many other conditions, so it is hard to tell.

The best way find out if you have a yeast infection is to see your doctor or nurse. They can run a swab (Q-tip) inside your vagina to collect vaginal fluids. Then, they can look at the vaginal fluids from the swab under a microscope and look for the fungus that causes yeast infections.

Sometimes a test is done to find out which type of yeast you have.

Depending on your situation, your doctor or nurse might do other tests on your vaginal fluid, too. One common test checks for yeast infections as well as bacterial vaginosis and trichomoniasis. These are other infections that can also cause itching and irritation.

How did I get a yeast infection?

The fungus that causes yeast infections normally lives in the vagina and the gut. Even though the yeast are there, they do not usually cause symptoms. Certain medicines (especially antibiotics), stress, and other factors can cause the fungus to grow more than it should. When that happens, a yeast infection can start.

How are yeast infections treated?

Yeast infections can be treated with a pill that you swallow or with medicines that you put in the vagina and on the vulva. The medicines that you put in the vagina come in creams and tablets. All medicines for yeast infections work by killing the fungus that causes the infections.

When will I feel better?

You will probably feel better within a few days of starting treatment. If you do not get better after you finish treatment, you should see your doctor or nurse again. You might need to take more medicine or a different medicine.

What if I get yeast infections often?

Be sure to see your doctor or nurse about it. That way you can find out for sure whether your symptoms are caused by a yeast infection and, if so, which type of yeast. There are a few different types of yeast, and they respond to different treatments. Plus, the same symptoms that you get with a yeast infection can sometimes be caused by other types of infections, an allergy, or other problems. If you get frequent infections, you might need a different treatment than you have tried in the past.

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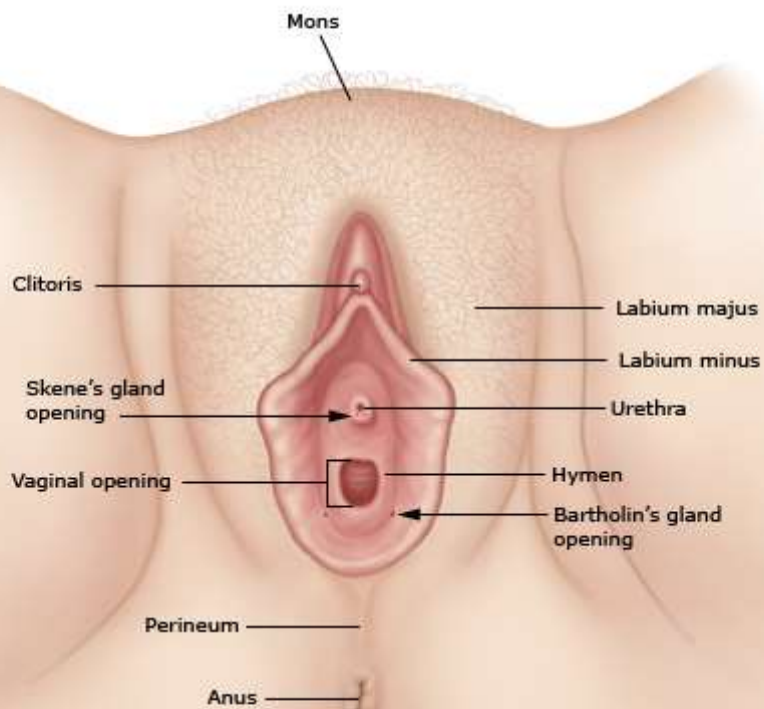
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GRAPHICS

Adult female external genitalia



This drawing shows the different parts of the genitals.

