

# THRUSH

## WHAT CAUSES THRUSH?

Thrush is caused by an overgrowth of yeasts within the vagina. It is very common and about 75% of women will have thrush at some time in their life. The most common organism involved is called *Candida albicans* (these are not the yeasts found in your diet).

Yeasts often live in small numbers in the vagina and cause no problems - it is only when they overgrow that they cause symptoms. The yeasts are very irritating to the sensitive vaginal and vulval skin. Thrush can occur for no obvious reason. However, there are some things that make thrush more likely; taking certain antibiotics, being pregnant, having diabetes, having sweaty and moist skin (eg cycling) or lots of friction (eg after sex).

Symptoms usually include itch and discomfort around the opening of the vagina, a burning sensation and pain during urinating and during sex. Sometimes a thick white lumpy discharge occurs which is described as 'like cottage cheese'. The area around the vulva and vagina may look red and swollen and there may be small skin cracks or splits.

## IS THRUSH SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED?

Most people carry yeasts in their mouth and bowel without any symptoms and it is not sexually transmitted, but male partners can sometimes get redness and irritation after sex.

## HOW IS THRUSH TREATED?

Thrush can be treated easily by anti-fungal creams and pessaries which are available without a script at the chemist. The treatments take from 1 to 6 days and are put inside the vagina with a special applicator.

Occasionally a second course of treatment is needed. There is also a tablet available at the chemist that you can take once by mouth called fluconazole, which is more expensive. If you are on other medications or are pregnant discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist before taking it.

## SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR?

If your symptoms fit with the typical description of thrush you can usually treat yourself from the chemist. *However, you should see your doctor if:*

- You are not sure you have thrush
- You have had several episodes of thrush
- You have had recent unprotected sex with a new partner
- You have pain in your pelvic area or abnormal bleeding
- You have tried the thrush treatment and haven't got better

## CAN I STILL HAVE SEX?

Yes. If it is not too uncomfortable you can have sex though you may experience a burning sensation during or afterwards. Use plenty of lubricant to protect your skin. The thrush treatments can weaken condoms so if you are using condoms don't put the treatments in until after sex.

## IS THRUSH DANGEROUS?

No. Thrush can be very uncomfortable but it does not cause long term damage.

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Thrush. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.