



VAGINAL

DISCHARGE

"A discharge is a fluid released from a hollow space, like the vagina."

Abnormal Discharge

Abnormal discharge is caused by a variety of infections and inflammations.

- Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is caused by some types of normal bacteria when they are present in large numbers (these are good bugs when present in small numbers). BV is not sexually transmitted.
- Candidiasis is caused by too much yeast. It is rarely sexually transmitted.
- Trichomoniasis (TV) is caused by a sexually transmitted parasite (bad bug).
- Chlamydia and gonorrhoea are sexually transmitted bacterial infections.
- Desquamative inflammatory vaginitis is a rare condition that produces a pus-like discharge. The cause is unknown. It is not sexually transmitted.

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What does it feel like?

Normal discharge just feels wet. There is no discomfort.

Abnormal discharge may cause irritation, itching, rawness, burning with urination, or pain with sex.

- Bacterial vaginosis does not usually cause discomfort, but can cause mild irritation with sex, and a fishy odor.
- Candidiasis can make the skin itching, swollen, red and sore.
- Trichomoniasis can cause itch and pain during urination.
- Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia may cause pain with urination and with sex, as well as, bleeding between periods or after sex.

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What does it look like?

Normal discharge can be variable but is usually clear or white. Abnormal discharge comes in a variety of colors (white, cream, green, grey, yellow), consistencies (creamy, chunky, watery), amount, and odor. A sudden change in your discharge may signal infection or inflammation, and you should see your health care provider.

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How is it diagnosed?

The correct diagnosis cannot be made by just looking at the discharge. Infections are diagnosed by taking appropriate samples; this usually involves taking swabs from the vagina or cervix, urine samples or other diagnostic tests.

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D I S C H A R G E

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How is it treated?

Normal discharge does not require treatment. Discharge associated with an infection should be treated with medications targeting the specific infection.

If you have chlamydia, gonorrhea, or trichomoniasis, your sexual partner(s) must also be tested and treated, even if they don't have symptoms; this includes partners with whom you are no longer having sex, otherwise, their other partners may become infected. Do not try to treat yourself. Many treatments that you read on the internet are not effective. Douching and lactobacilli tablets are not useful treatments.

If you are not sure whether your discharge is normal, talk to your health care provider. If you have a fever or pain as well as a discharge, seek care immediately, as this could mean a serious infection.