

Candidiasis (Thrush) – vulvovaginal

Thrush is a very common vaginal infection, caused by an overgrowth of yeasts which live normally in the bowel and may be present in other parts of the body, such as the mouth, skin and vagina. The most common cause of thrush is *Candida albicans*, but other types of yeast sometimes are involved.

Candida is usually present in small numbers and does not cause symptoms. Sometimes, overgrowth of *Candida* occurs and symptoms develop. Also, some women may be more sensitive than others to the presence of *Candida* and can develop symptoms even when only small numbers of yeast are present.

Symptoms of thrush in women include:

- > vaginal itch, discomfort or irritation
- > vaginal discharge
- > redness and/or swelling of the vagina or vulva
- > stinging or burning when passing urine.

Thrush is not the only cause of symptoms like these. Other conditions such as genital herpes or urinary tract infection may have similar signs, so it is important to have the diagnosis confirmed.

Candidiasis is diagnosed by microscopic examination and growth of yeast from a swab from the vagina.

Circumstances that encourage the overgrowth of *Candida albicans* include:

- > hormonal changes (for example, pregnancy or the oral contraceptive pill)
- > antibiotic treatment
- > diabetes
- > immune suppression (for example, HIV infection, treatment for some cancers, use of steroids).

Candidiasis is not considered to be a sexually transmitted infection.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

The yeasts which cause thrush may be present all the time. It is changes in the woman's body which allow the condition to develop.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Person-to-person spread does not usually occur.

Treatment

Effective treatments with vaginal creams and vaginal tablets are available.

Patients with frequently recurring candidiasis should seek medical advice to make sure that they do not have a medical condition such as diabetes. Additional treatment with oral tablets may be required.

There is no evidence that dietary changes help prevent thrush.

Control of spread

- > Male sexual partners of women with candidiasis do not require treatment, except very occasionally when a woman has recurrent infections.
- > Always wipe from front to back after using the toilet, to avoid spreading yeast from the anus to the vagina.