

# Thrush

## What is thrush (Candida albicans)?

Many women have thrush at some time in their life. It is common in adults who are stressed or have damaged immune systems because of HIV infection. Many babies also get it.

Thrush is caused by a tiny yeast-like organism called *Candida albicans* that normally lives quite harmlessly on your skin and in your mouth and gut.

## Thrush is more likely to develop if you:

- Are pregnant
- Are taking certain antibiotics
- Have diabetes
- Are unwell or ill
- Are taking the contraceptive pill
- Have unprotected penetrative sex with someone who has thrush
- Eat lots of sugar or sugar-based products
- Wear very tight jeans or trousers or nylon underwear

## How can you tell if you have thrush?

You may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Sore spots or thick white fur on the tongue, mouth or gums
- Itching, soreness and redness around your vagina, vulva or anus
- Thick white discharge from your vagina that looks white and lumpy and smells like yeast
- Swollen vulva
- Pain when you have penetrative sex
- Pain when you urinate

## Treatment

Medical treatment for thrush is easy, usually consisting of cream and pessaries (suppositories), or tablets.

## Is there anything you can do yourself to relieve the symptoms of thrush?

- At the first sign of irritation, stop using soap and clean yourself with water
- Stop wearing tight pants or jeans - it helps to let as much air circulate as possible
- Don't be tempted to have frequent baths or to wash yourself more often. It may feel soothing for a short while but it tends to make the irritation worse
- Don't put disinfectant or bubble bath in the water. However, you can put some vinegar in your bath, or 10 drops of tea tree oil

In places where live yoghurt is available, some women with thrush have applied it to the outside of the vagina where it soothes the irritation. Some women also put live yoghurt into their vagina with a syringe or on a tampon. The beneficial bacteria found naturally in live yoghurt is thought to destroy thrush. It works for some women but not all. Garlic is an alternative which may work for you. Peel a clove, slit it and dip it in oil. Insert it into the vagina. Insert a clove once in the morning. Remove and insert a new clove in the evening. Repeat next day or until the symptoms improve.

## Can you prevent thrush?

There are no simple solutions. But there are a number of things you can do to prevent getting it so frequently:

- For thrush in the mouth avoid sugar at all times, particularly when you have an attack

- If you have an attack of thrush avoid fruit, honey and yeast until you are clear of the thrush for at least three weeks
- Avoid wearing tights, underwear made with nylon, tight jeans or trousers
- Use sanitary pads rather than tampons if you are menstruating
- Avoid perfumed soaps, genital sprays and deodorants, and disinfectants. Also avoid vaginal douching with chemical mixtures. All of these upset the beneficial balance inside the vagina
- After defecating, always reach from behind and wipe away from the vagina. You want to avoid getting faecal matter in your vagina
- If you are prescribed an antibiotic for some other infection, remind your doctor that you tend to get thrush.

### **Can you have sex while having treatment?**

It is best not to have penetrative vaginal or anal sex or oral sex until you have had your final check up with your health practitioner. If you have thrush in your mouth, stop kissing until you are well again. Hugging and cuddling are always fine.