
SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON THRUSH

Thrush is usually caused by a yeast called *candida albicans*. This yeast usually lives harmlessly on the skin and in the mouth, gut, and vagina. Occasionally, however, signs and symptoms such as itch, discharge and pain can develop. This leaflet focuses on thrush that develops in or around the genitals.

Causes

Your chances of developing thrush increase if you:

- are pregnant
- wear tight clothing (such as tight jeans) or synthetic clothing (such as nylon underwear)
- are taking antibiotics
- are having chemotherapy
- have uncontrolled diabetes, HIV or other illnesses that affect your immune system
- use products that may irritate, such as vaginal deodorant, bubble bath or shower gel.

Sign and symptoms

Some people won't have any signs or symptoms at all. If you do get symptoms, you might notice:

- pain when passing urine or having sex
- *in women:*
 - itching, soreness and redness or fissures (like paper cuts) around the vagina, vulva (the opening to the vagina and urethra, the labia (vaginal lips) and the clitoris) or anus
 - unusual, white discharge from the vagina that may be thick– it sometimes smells yeasty
- *In men:*
 - irritation, burning, itching, redness, or fissures (like paper cuts) under the foreskin or on the tip of the penis
 - a thin or thicker white discharge, under the foreskin which sometimes smells yeasty
 - difficulty in pulling back the foreskin.

If you think you may have thrush, speak to your pharmacist for over-the-counter treatment. A nurse or doctor can also give advice if things are not settling with over-the-counter treatment or things are more complicated.

Thrush isn't a sexually transmitted infection but it's important you don't delay getting advice if you may have been at risk of a sexually transmitted infection.

Testing

It's not always necessary to have a test for thrush. If you do need have a test (for example if the diagnosis is uncertain), a doctor or nurse may:

- look at the genital area, the vagina, or the penis
- use a swab to collect a sample from the vagina, penis, or genital area

A swab looks like a cotton bud, but is smaller, soft, and rounded. Swabbing the affected area only takes a few seconds and isn't usually painful. You may have to wait up to two weeks to get your result.

Sometimes thrush signs will be noticed during a cervical screening test (smear), but you'll only need treatment if you have problems with discharge or itching. Routine blood tests don't detect thrush.

Where can I get a test?

If you do need to confirm the diagnosis with a test (if treatments aren't working or the diagnosis is unclear), then you can have one as soon as you have signs and symptoms. There are several ways to arrange this:

- a home test kits can be purchased from your pharmacy.
- the Contraception and sexual health clinic. Our local service is called Hope house
Tel: 03004216500, website: <https://www.hopehouse.nhs.uk/>
- here at the GP practice

Home tests for other infections including chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HIV and syphilis can also be ordered online from Hope house:

<https://www.hopehouse.nhs.uk/sti/home-testing-kit/>

Treatment

For many people thrush goes away by itself. Treatment is simple and only necessary if you have persistent and bothersome signs and symptoms of thrush. If you do decide on treatment, then keep in mind:

- Many antifungal creams can be purchased over the counter from the pharmacist and are applied to the genital area, vaginal pessaries (tablets that you put into your vagina), pills or a combination. The pharmacist will advise you how to use the treatment.
- It's very important to take the treatment as instructed and finish any course of treatment even if the symptoms go away earlier.
- Some antifungal products can weaken latex condoms, diaphragms, and caps. Polyurethane (soft plastic) types can be safely used. Ask the doctor, nurse, or pharmacist for advice.
- Tell the pharmacist, doctor or nurse if you're pregnant, might be pregnant, or if you're breastfeeding. This may affect the type of treatment you're given.
- Speak to a doctor or nurse if the treatment is not working.



How effective is the treatment?

Antifungal cream, pessaries or pills are usually effective if you use them according to instructions. Symptoms should disappear within a few days. If the first treatment doesn't work, the doctor or nurse may suggest another test or a combination of treatments. There's no need for a partner to have treatment unless they have signs and symptoms.

Triggers

Some people find that different triggers cause vaginal thrush. If you notice a pattern, you may be able to help control it. For example:

- avoid wearing tight, restrictive, or synthetic clothing, such as tights, nylon underwear, leggings, lycra shorts, and tight jeans or trousers
- make sure you use lubrication before and during sexual intercourse
- women should wash and wipe your genital area from the front to the back
- avoid using soap and deodorants near the genital area, genital sprays, bubble bath, and any other irritants such as disinfectants and antiseptics.
- If you're prescribed an antibiotic for another condition, ask for some treatment for thrush at the same time.

Recurrent thrush

Some people may only get thrush once. Others may get it multiple times. Getting thrush four or more times in a year is called recurrent thrush. If this happens, get medical advice, and don't treat it yourself. If you get recurrent thrush the doctor or nurse:

- will want to check that other conditions, such as diabetes, aren't the cause of the thrush
- may suggest you take antifungal treatment on a regular basis
- may send a swab to check the thrush isn't being caused by a different kind of yeast
- may suggest you stop using soap and use an emollient (soap substitute) instead
- will help you to identify any thrush triggers.

Pregnancy

Pregnancy can increase your chance of thrush developing. Thrush isn't harmful to you or the baby. It can be safely treated using pessaries or creams. You shouldn't take pills for thrush if you're pregnant. Always get advice before taking any treatment if you're pregnant.

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/

If you have further questions:

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*

If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an **emergency** call **999**