

How to Recognize Bacterial Vaginosis Symptoms

Two Parts: [Recognizing the Symptoms](#) [Treating and Preventing BV](#)

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a vaginal infection that occurs when the usual balance of "good" and "bad" bacteria in the vagina is disrupted. BV is extremely common, especially among women of childbearing years - in fact, most women will experience it at some point in their lives. Although BV is not usually serious, it can lead to harmful complications if left untreated. Start with Step 1 below to learn how to recognize the symptoms of BV, and keep reading for some helpful information on treatment and prevention methods.

Part
1

Recognizing the Symptoms

- 1 Look for unusual vaginal discharge.** BV is often accompanied by a thin grey or white colored discharge.
- 2 Look for an unpleasant odor.** The discharge is often accompanied by an unpleasant odor, which can be described as "fish-like". The odor usually becomes worse after intercourse.^[1]
- 3 Look for a burning sensation while urinating.** Though BV does not normally cause pain, some women experience a burning sensation during urination.
- 4 Look for itchiness.** The outside of the vagina may become itchy, though the itchiness is normally mild. It can become worse if soap is use around the area.
- 5 Understand that BV sometimes has no symptoms.** Some women with BV experience no obvious signs or symptoms at all. This is unfortunate as, if left untreated, BV can lead to more serious health issues down the line.^[2]

Part
2

Treating and Preventing BV

- 1 Understand the consequences of an untreated BV infection.** Although bacterial vaginosis is usually pretty harmless, in some cases it can lead to serious complications, if left untreated. These complications include:
 - An increased susceptibility to HIV infection if exposed to the HIV virus, and an increased susceptibility to other sexually-transmitted infections, such as chlamydia and gonorrhea.
 - Increased risk of infection following surgical procedures such as hysterectomies and abortions.
 - Increased risk of complications during pregnancy, such as premature delivery and low birth weight.
 - An increased risk of developing pelvic inflammatory disease, which is an infection of the uterus and fallopian tubes and can lead to infertility.^[3]
- 2 See your doctor if you suspect you may have BV.** Although BV will sometimes (in about 1/3 of cases) clear up on its own, it's still important to see your doctor and receive antibiotic treatment, in order to avoid potentially serious complications.
 - Your doctor will usually prescribe an antibiotic such as metronidazole or clindamycin. These antibiotics can be taken orally as a pill, or applied topically as a vaginal gel or cream.
 - It is particularly important to receive treatment for BV if you are pregnant, in order to avoid complications.
 - In fact, the CDC recommends that all pregnant women who have ever had a premature delivery or low birth weight baby should undergo a BV examination and, if necessary, receive treatment.^[4]

3 Prevent BV from recurring. Unfortunately, BV is still not fully understood by scientists, so there is no surefire way to prevent it from recurring. However, there are several things you can do to maintain the balance of "good" and "bad" bacteria in the vagina, which can help you to avoid BV:

- **Limit your number of sexual partners:** Having sex with multiple partners can upset the natural balance of the vagina, therefore try to abstain from sex or limit the number of people you have sex with. When you do have sex, make sure to use a male latex condom to avoid picking up an STD.^[5]
- **Do not douche:** Douching disrupts the normal balance of your vagina and makes you more susceptible to developing BV. Douching will not clear a vaginal infection and is strongly discouraged by the US Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Avoid vaginal irritation:** Things like washing your vaginal area with soap, using scented tampons or sanitary pads and frequently using hot tubs can irritate your vagina and increase the risk of developing BV. The use of IUDs has also been linked with an increased risk of BV.
- **Alter your diet:** Some research has suggested that following a diet rich in folate, calcium and vitamin E can help to decrease the risk of developing BV. It can also be helpful to quit smoking.^[6]

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Tips

- The bacteria that cause BV could infect the uterus and fallopian tubes. This type of infection is called pelvic inflammatory disease.
- Don't wear panty liners every day. If you must, change them often.
- Women who have never had sex may also get BV.

Warnings

- Expectant mothers with BV have babies born premature or with low birth weight more often than women who do not have the infection.
- Bacterial vaginosis cannot be passed from a woman to a man during sex, however female partners may pass BV to each other.

Sources and Citations

1. http://www.medicinenet.com/bacterial_vaginosis_causes_symptoms_treatment/page2.htm#what_are_the_signs_and_symptoms_of_bacterial_vaginosis
2. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/bv/stdfact-bacterial-vaginosis.htm>
3. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bacterial-vaginosis/basics/complications/con-20035345>

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