

Bacterial vaginosis



SOAIDS



Bacterial vaginosis (also known as BV) is the most common vaginal disorder in sexually active women. It is not actually a sexually transmitted infection (STI), but is caused by a change in the acid/alkaline balance in the vagina.

There is normally the right balance between levels of acid and alkaline in the vagina. Most bacteria cannot live in that environment. If the balance is upset, bacteria which are always found in small amounts in the vagina have the opportunity to grow. Bacteria that live in the intestine may also go into the vagina and cause problems. The vaginal balance can be upset by, for example, washing the vagina with soap, vaginal douches, sex without a condom or taking certain antibiotics. Age, background and hormone levels may also have an effect on the acidic levels in the vagina.

The infection can be treated with antibiotics.



Symptoms

Around half of the women with bacterial vaginosis will have signs or symptoms of the infection. The most common symptom is a change in your vaginal discharge; it will increase and be stickier and whiter. It may also smell unpleasant (fishy). If the discharge comes into contact with semen, the smell will be even stronger.



Possible complications

In the past, vaginal infections weren't used to be taken very seriously: they were 'a nuisance, but harmless'. Only women with symptoms were treated. But the infection can have complications. In pregnant women there is a risk of a premature birth. And a vaginal infection can spread and lead to an inflammation of the fallopian tubes or the lower pelvis. This can later turn out to be the cause of reduced fertility. Women with bacterial vaginosis also have a higher risk of infection with HIV or other STIs.



Treatment

Bacterial vaginosis is treated with a short course of antibiotics. The treatment may cause some nausea. There is no point in treating a male partner. If a woman has a female partner, it is advisable to treat her partner too. Besides the treatment itself, women are advised on how best to not upset the acidic balance in the vagina. The most important advice is to not use soap or any other 'intimate products' to douche the vagina. Despite treatment and advice, in some women the infection comes back again and again.



Further information

Further information about STIs is available on the Soa Aids Nederland (STI AIDS Netherlands) website. Soa Aids Nederland is a centre of expertise for HIV infection and other STIs. The www.soaaid.nl website gives detailed information on HIV and other STIs. Young people can visit the Dutch information site www.sense.info.

For answers to your questions on STIs, call the AIDS STI Infoline

0900-204 204 0 (10 cents per minute)

Mon - Fri 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Thurs and Fri 2 - 8 p.m.

or send an e-mail to: infolijn@soaaid.nl

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