

# BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS

## FACT SHEET

### What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

**Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a condition where there are too many of a certain type of bacteria in the vagina.**

Bacteria which are normally present in small numbers can sometimes overgrow, causing bacterial vaginosis. This overgrowth can be treated or it may clear up by itself.

### What are the symptoms of bacterial vaginosis?

Normal vaginal discharge may change, becoming watery and pearly. A strong fishy smell is common. The smell may be more noticeable with menstruation or after sex without a condom. Often there are no symptoms and bacterial vaginosis is sometimes found when testing for other conditions such as thrush.

### What causes bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis is a vaginal infection and it is not something that you 'catch'. While it is more common in people who are sexually active it can occur at any time. It is not a sexually transmitted infection. Bacterial vaginosis can occur when conditions in the vagina change and upset the normal balance of bacteria. It can be associated with new or increased sexual activity or with other changes such as menstruation or sexually transmitted infections.

It can also be associated with the use of soaps, vaginal deodorants, douches, bath oils or bath additives which can alter the normal balance of the vagina. Bacterial vaginosis also appears to be more common in people with a same sex partner.

Bacterial vaginosis is unlikely to be caused by taking the contraceptive Pill or antibiotics.

### When should I have a test for bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis is not part of a routine check for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It may sometimes be included in tests before having a gynaecological procedure.

You should have a test for bacterial vaginosis if you are having symptoms such as discharge.

### How do I get tested for bacterial vaginosis?

A swab from the vagina is used to test for bacterial vaginosis. If you have symptoms this should be done as part of an examination and STI check by a health professional.

### When is treatment needed?

If there are no symptoms or the symptoms are not troublesome then it's OK to do nothing.

Treatment may be needed when:

- symptoms are a problem
- you are pregnant
- you are undergoing a gynaecological procedure such as an IUD insertion

### How is bacterial vaginosis treated?

Bacterial vaginosis is usually treated with a course of antibiotics (do not drink alcohol during this treatment).

Bacterial vaginosis can also be treated by an antibiotic vaginal gel or cream (be aware the vaginal cream can weaken condoms and shouldn't be used if condoms are your main form of contraception).

It is common for same sex partners to also have bacterial vaginosis, and they may want to consider testing and treatment.

It's not necessary for partners with a penis to be tested or be treated.

### Will I get bacterial vaginosis again?

You may get bacterial vaginosis again. Recurrences are common and can be treated, but this may only resolve the problem temporarily. Changing treatments may be useful.

## How do I keep my vagina healthy?

There are some simple ways to maintain good vaginal health.

You can:

- avoid using perfumed or medicated creams, oils, soaps, antiseptics or bath additives in the vagina
- wear cotton underwear and change daily
- change pads or tampons regularly
- avoid douching (washing inside) the vagina
- only use water to wash the vulva
- clean any sex toys between uses

If you think something is not right seek professional help.

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CONTACT  
SHINE SA

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### **Clinic & Counselling Appointments and General Enquiries**

Tel 1300 794 584

Clinic locations and times are available at [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)

### **Sexual Healthline**

Tel 1300 883 793 **Country callers (toll free)** 1800 188 171

Talk to a sexual health nurse about any sexual health issue.

Available 9am – 12.30pm, Monday – Friday

### **National Relay Service**

[www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)

133 677 (TTY/Voice) 1300 555 727 (Speak & Listen) 0423 677 767 (SMS Relay)