

# 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.

### How common is bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis is very common. Often there are no symptoms and in these cases it's generally nothing to worry about, as it will usually clear up over time.

### How can I get bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis only affects women and is not something you can 'catch'. While it's more common in women who are sexually active, it can occur in women who are not sexually active.

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

### How do I know if I have bacterial vaginosis?

Normal vaginal discharge may change, becoming watery and pearly. Vaginal irritation may occur, and a strong fishy smell is common. These symptoms, especially the smell, may only be noticed after sex without a condom. Often there are no symptoms and bacterial vaginosis only shows up on a vaginal swab.

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

A swab from the vagina is used to test for bacterial vaginosis.

### 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, because there is a slightly increased risk of the waters breaking early and premature birth
- you are undergoing any medical procedures which may allow bacteria into the uterus (e.g. IUD insertion)

### How is bacterial vaginosis treated?

Bacterial vaginosis is usually treated with antibiotics. Metronidazole or tinidazole may be prescribed by your doctor (do not drink alcohol during this treatment).

Bacterial vaginosis can also be treated by:

- changing the acidity of the vagina using Aci-jel, which is effective because it alters the conditions for the vaginal bacteria – you can get this over the counter at a pharmacy
- clindamycin vaginal cream (Dalacin V) prescribed by your doctor

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

It's not necessary for male sex partners to 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?

Bacterial vaginosis is difficult to prevent, but 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
- clean any sex toys between uses

If you think something is not right seek professional help.

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CONTACT  
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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)