

Yes, Men Get Yeast Infections, Too

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Women don't want to get them (again), and men assume they never will. We're talking about yeast infections.

Yes, while they are far more common in females, males can also develop these irritating genital infections, especially during the sweaty summer months.

The yeast that causes these infections in both men and women naturally occurs in our mouths, throats, guts, and vagina, and is called *candida*. This fungus often doesn't cause any problems, but under certain circumstances, an overgrowth can bloom into a yeast infection.

Uncircumcised men have a greater risk of developing yeast infections.

For men and women, yeast is more likely to multiply in moist, warm environments (like bathing suits and gym shorts). Those with compromised immune systems or diabetes often get yeast infections in the groin and mouth.

Hormonal fluctuations associated with menstruation, pregnancy, sexual activity, or weight gain, as well as taking antibiotics, can trigger an itchy overgrowth of yeast.

What does a penile yeast infection feel like?

Because men rarely experience yeast infections, you may not recognize the

symptoms. A penile yeast infection typically causes:

- Itching on the penis
- A red rash
- White, shiny patches on the penis
- Moist penis skin
- A thick, white substance under the foreskin or in other skin folds

Common genital yeast infections in men occur at the head of the penis (balanitis) and/or foreskin (balanoposthitis) as well as in the folds of the groin (candidal intertrigo). There may be satellite rashes on other areas of the body.

Treating yeast infections in men

In most cases, OTC topical antifungal ointments and creams can clear up penile yeast infections within a week. For more intense symptoms, a round of oral fluconazole may be prescribed.

If the infection returns, your doctor may prescribe weeks of fluconazole treatment.

While you may be hesitant to see a doctor for minor symptoms like genital itching, a urologist, primary care physician, or an urgent care center can diagnose and treat this condition while ruling out other infections like sexually transmitted diseases.

“Men who are prone to genital yeast infections should remain vigilant for early signs or symptoms of infection so they can seek prompt treatment when needed,” explains Dr. Ranjith Ramasamy, a urology expert at UHealth.

Patients with severely weakened immune systems, such as those undergoing chemotherapy for cancer or those with HIV/AIDS, should seek immediate medical

treatment for penile yeast infections. If left untreated, these infections can become invasive, enter the bloodstream, and cause more painful symptoms and even serious complications in those with compromised immune systems. Such patients may be prescribed continuous antifungal prophylaxis treatment, but there is a risk of becoming resistant to the medication.

“It’s important to take antifungal medication only as prescribed by a healthcare provider,” Dr. Ramasamy says, “as the benefit of preventing infection and increasing possible resistance must be weighed appropriately by a medical professional.”

What does a vaginal yeast infection feel like?

Symptoms include:

- vaginal and vulvar itching
- thick and white vaginal discharge that is usually not foul-smelling
- a burning sensation with touch or urination
- discomfort during sex

Although most vulvovaginal yeast infections are mild, signs of a severe infection include redness, swelling, and pain when touched.

This type of infection is different from vaginal bacterial infections and sexually transmitted infections. Bacterial vaginosis symptoms include grey-white discharge (not thick nor clumpy), which is foul-smelling, typically without itching and burning.

Seeking relief from yeast infections?

When you have an active yeast infection, you may feel desperate for symptom relief. But avoid vaginal douching as a treatment.

“Studies have suggested that it may actually exacerbate symptoms,” says Dr. Cecilia Torres Ochoa, a gynecologist with the University of Miami Health System.

Some over-the-counter (OTC) creams and vaginal wipes claim they relieve itching. But, only “antifungal creams with labeling on the package that is specific to vaginal yeast infections are FDA-approved to treat vaginal yeast infection,” she said. “And it is always recommended to use non-scented soaps or wipes for genital care.”

If you experience symptoms associated with a vaginal yeast infection, and you recognize these symptoms or have experienced these infections before, try OTC topical antifungal treatments, says Dr. Torres Ochoa.

“If you don’t have prior knowledge of symptoms or have symptoms that don’t improve after a few days of OTC therapy, then a visit to the gynecologist is recommended for evaluation.”

Your doctor may prescribe a single dose of oral fluconazole to clear up the infection.

Patients with complicated cases may need more aggressive treatment.

“A second dose of fluconazole may be required three days after the first to obtain relief,” Dr. Torres Ochoa says. “For women with recurrent symptoms after initial therapy, prolonged weekly antifungal treatment for six months may be necessary.”

Long-term oral antifungal therapy must be prescribed by your medical provider. “High-risk populations, such as patients with immunosuppression (a lowered ability

to fight infections and other diseases), diabetes, and those on chemo-radiation therapy, need to be evaluated and treated by a medical professional with experience in these particular cases," she says.

Preventing yeast infections in both men and women

"The risk of acquiring a yeast infection from an infected partner is quite low," says Dr. Ramasamy. "It is unlikely that a yeast infection can be spread from an infected male to his sexual partner. But, during an active infection, it would be wise to avoid sexual contact. If abstinence is not an option, protection such as a condom is recommended."

To help prevent infection, it is important for men to avoid skin breakdown caused by excess moisture. "Use drying powders, wear loose clothing, and maintain a healthy weight," says Dr. Ramasamy. "It is also important for men to practice good hygiene, especially in the groin area, to further protect themselves."

Dr. Torres Ochoa recommends that women also practice good personal hygiene to avoid infection, "such as wearing cotton-only underwear (since it diminishes irritation at the vulva), changing out of wet clothing (after swimming or exercising), and abstaining from shaving the bikini area." But, there's no need to worry about your intrauterine contraceptive device (such as an IUD) causing yeast infections.

When taking antibiotics, both men and women are more likely to develop a fungal infection in the genitals or mouth. As a preventive measure, try eating less sugar and replenishing your gut's healthy bacteria with probiotics. Refrigerated capsules or yogurts may do the trick, though it's not proven that probiotics are 100 percent effective.

It is important to control conditions like diabetes that can trigger or worsen genital yeast infections due to rises in blood glucose levels.

Call **305-689-2636** to schedule an appointment.

Dana Kantrowitz is a contributing writer for UMiami Health News.

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