

Balanitis

What causes balanitis?

Balanitis is an inflammation of the glans (head) of the penis. It may be caused by an overgrowth of bacteria or yeasts which are usually present on the skin of the glans of the penis. Balanitis can also be caused by irritation from chemicals in products applied to the skin, allergies to some medicines, and due to medical problems such as diabetes.

What are the symptoms of balanitis?

- pain and tenderness
- itching
- a pink or red rash which may be smooth, scaly, spotty or patchy
- unusual discharge
- unpleasant odour
- difficulty retracting the foreskin.

Why does it happen?

The following can increase the risk of balanitis occurring:

- infrequent washing or too much washing
- washing with soap, body wash or disinfectants
- not drying after washing
- minor trauma such as friction during sex
- diabetes

What is the treatment for balanitis?

The best treatment for balanitis is good hygiene. Pull your foreskin back until the glans is completely uncovered and wash the area with a soap substitute such as sorbolene, aqueous cream or a mild cleanser each day.

Balanitis is not normally treated with medication, creams or ointments. Maintaining good skin care will allow your skin to heal and prevent you from getting it in the future. If you have frequent occurrences of balanitis see your health care provider.

Can I have sex?

Yes it is fine to have sex if you have balanitis – as long as it doesn't cause you discomfort. You cannot transmit balanitis to your partner.

What do I do if my symptoms don't go away?

If you have symptoms which won't go away, see your healthcare provider.

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References

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (2012) Balanitis Factsheet. www.mshc.org.au

South Australia Health (2016) Balanitis Factsheet.
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