

Candidiasis (also called ‘thrush’) is a common condition.

## What are the symptoms of candidiasis?

- Vulval and/or vaginal itching, soreness, burning and swelling
- White or yellow vaginal discharge
- Painful sex
- Irritation and rash on the head of the penis
- Swollen foreskin
- Stinging when passing urine
- Redness of your skin
- Skin splits, cracks or shallow ulcers
- A rash which you may see away from your genitals (e.g. on your inner thigh)

These symptoms also happen with other conditions like allergy, skin irritation, genital herpes and other infections. It is important to have the right diagnosis so you can get the right treatment.

## What causes candidiasis?

Vaginal candidiasis is caused by yeast that normally live in the vagina and do not cause any problems. Certain situations can make this yeast grow more than usual. When that happens, you can start having symptoms. Other things that may make you more likely to get genital candidiasis include:

- being pregnant
- having diabetes that is not well controlled (high blood sugar levels)
- taking antibiotics
- having a weakened immune system.

## Who gets candidiasis and how common is it?

Vaginal candidiasis happens mainly in people who are of reproductive age. It is less common once you have finished menopause if you don’t take oestrogen. It is rare to get it if you haven’t started menstruating (getting periods).

Penile candidiasis can occur beneath the foreskin of the penis. There is no conclusive evidence of sexual transmission as a cause and it is more often related to other medical conditions. It is uncommon in circumcised people.

## How is candidiasis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on symptoms, signs and laboratory testing. To make sure they make the right diagnosis, your health professional may suggest you have an examination:

- Your vagina will be examined using a speculum. A speculum is a device used to hold the walls of your vagina apart so that your cervix and vaginal walls can be checked. A sample of discharge can be collected using a cotton swab.

- The effect area of your penis will be swabbed with a cotton swab.

## What is the treatment for candidiasis?

There are several treatment choices. For vaginal candidiasis, treatment includes tablets (Fluconazole) and/or creams (Clotrimazole) to put into your vagina. Do not take tablets while you are pregnant or breastfeeding. For penile thrush, you put cream directly onto your affected skin.

Creams may damage latex. Don't use cream if you are using condoms or diaphragms.

**A note on self-treatment:** Do not assume that your symptoms are caused by candidiasis. Many people treat their own symptoms which may make them worse. It is best to see a health professional to have a check-up if you have unusual genital symptoms.

## What can happen if candidiasis is not treated?

There are usually no serious problems if candidiasis is left untreated, but your symptoms may get worse.

## Is it safe to have sex with candidiasis?

If it is not too uncomfortable, it is safe to have sex if you have candidiasis. It is possible (but uncommon) for candida infections to be passed on through sex. Sexual partners with symptoms should see a health professional to make sure they have the right diagnosis and get the right treatment.

## Will candidiasis come back again?

Some people may have recurrent vaginal episodes of candidiasis. If you experience recurrences, it is best to see a health care professional as you may need alternate treatment. Recurrent penile candidiasis is uncommon.

If you need more information or have any questions, please contact the Canberra Sexual Health Clinic on (02) 5124 2184.

### References:

Sobel, J (2019) Patient information: Vaginal yeast infection, <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/vaginal-yeast-infection-beyond-the-basics>

Barrisford, G (2019) Balanitis and balanoposthitis in men.

<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/balanitis-and-balanoposthitis-in-adults>

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