

## Introduction

Many people with vaginas feel awkward talking about vaginal discomfort, even with their healthcare providers. Vaginal health is important, and vaginal discomfort is very common. Here are some reasons why you may be feeling vaginal discomfort.

## Background

**Anatomy:** The external genitalia of persons with vaginas consist of the labia majora and labia minora. The vagina is the internal structure leading to the cervix and uterus. The clitoris is at the top of the labia and the urethra is between the clitoris and the vaginal opening. Multiple lubricating glands keep the vagina moist. Normal discharge is clear or white and can change throughout the menstrual cycle.

**Microbiome:** The healthy vagina of a reproductive-aged person has a pH of 4.0-4.5, making it slightly acidic. Discomfort and changes in discharge can happen when the vagina gets more basic and when the normal, healthy bacteria that colonize the vagina are overgrown or imbalanced by pathogenic bacteria.

## VAGINAL DISCOMFORT

**Vaginitis** is a term for vaginal discomfort, pain, and itching. There are many different causes. Treatment is usually oral medicine or topical (inside the vagina).

**Vulvovaginal Candidiasis:** Many people have yeast in their reproductive tract, and sometimes this yeast overgrows and causes itching, pain, discomfort during sex, and thick, white discharge. People with suppressed immune systems, antibiotic use, and diabetes are at increased risk for yeast infections.

**Bacterial Vaginosis:** BV happens when the good bacteria in the vagina are overgrown by other bacteria. It causes vaginal discomfort and itching and can lead to more serious infections if not treated. BV is not a sexually transmitted disease, but it happens more in sexually active people and people who use douches, spermicides, and other substances and objects that go inside the vagina. Some people notice a fishy smell, and grey-white discharge. The pH in these cases is usually >4.5, or more basic than normal. Sexual partners do not have to be treated.

**Trichomonas:** Trichomonas is a common sexually transmitted infection and can be prevented by using condoms. People with trichomoniasis experience pain, itching, and pain with urination. They sometimes notice yellow-green discharge and pain with sex. The skin of the vagina can be red and sore. People are treated with oral medicine and their sexual partners are treated as well.

**STIs:** Gonorrhea and chlamydia are common sexually transmitted infections. They can cause changes in discharge, pain with sex, pain with peeing, and other symptoms. Many health care providers test a patient's urine for these organisms when they have vaginal discomfort. Sometimes people with these STIs don't have any symptoms, so it is important to get tested if you are sexually active with new partners.

**Atrophic vaginitis:** After menopause, women don't have as much estrogen in their bodies. Without estrogen, the vaginal skin gets thinner and the microbiome of the vagina gets more basic. People experience vaginal dryness, pain with sex, itching, yellow discharge, pain with peeing, and other genital and urinary symptoms. Some people notice their external genitalia look different and they lose pubic hair. Some people take oral estrogen replacement for less than 5 years to help their symptoms. Other people benefit from topical estrogen creams. Foreplay and sexual activity can help treat dryness.

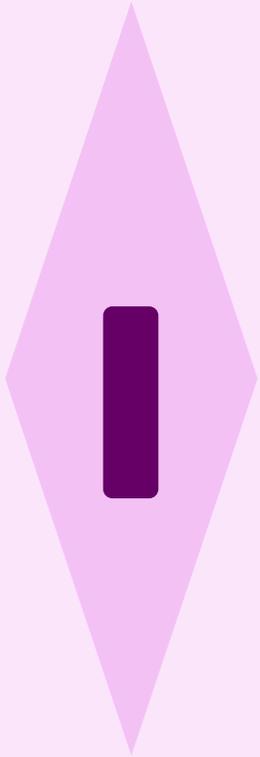
**Contact irritation:** Perfumes, powders, soaps, deodorants, lubricants, spermicides, tight-fitting clothes, and long-term pad and tampon use can change the microbiome of the vagina and cause discomfort. It's always a good idea to talk to a health care provider before changing the way you treat your vagina. Most vaginas are kept clean and healthy with warm water and very gentle soap.

**Lumps and Bumps:** There are many conditions that can lead to someone feeling a "lump" or "bump" on their genitals. Often, they are common and harmless. Rarely, they can be more serious. It is always a good idea to see a health care provider if you feel a new or irritating lump or bump.

## A Friendly Reminder

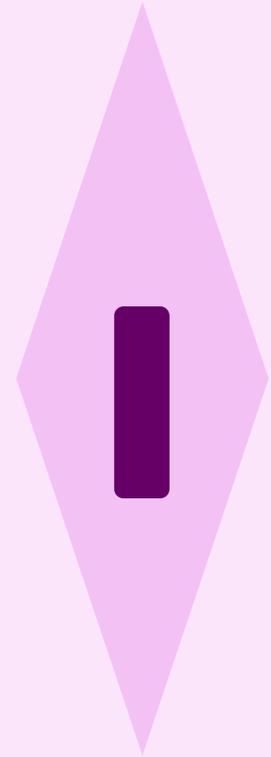
Lots of people with vaginas experience discomfort over the course of their lives. It is important to talk about vaginal health with your healthcare provider so he or she can treat any symptoms and prevent complications. Your health care provider wants to hear about any concerns you have, so you can maximize your health and happiness!

It's Not  
TMI:



Causes and Risks of  
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