

Health Information Sheet | Canberra Health Services

Candidiasis

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

What are the symptoms of candidiasis?

- vulval and/or vaginal itching, soreness, burning and swelling
- white, often lumpy 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, 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 yeasts that normally live in the vagina or under the foreskin and do not cause any problems. Sometimes yeasts 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 and in people with poorly controlled diabetes. It is less common after menopause unless taking menopausal hormone treatment. Candidiasis is rare before the start of menstruation (periods).

Penile candidiasis can occur beneath the foreskin of the penis and is uncommon in circumcised people.

Sexual transmission is uncommon and is usually related to other medical conditions, like one partner having diabetes.

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 affected 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 creams (Clotrimazole) to put into your vagina or tablets taken by mouth (Fluconazole). Do not take these 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.

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?

Candidiasis can come back after you have had treatment. If you experience recurrences, it is best to see a health care professional as you may need a different treatment. Your doctor may also check for diabetes. Penile candidiasis is less likely to come back after treatment.

If you need more information or have any questions, please contact the Canberra Sexual Health Centre on (02) 5124 2184 or talk to your GP.



Other resources:

[Thrush - STI Testing and Prevention - Stay STI Free](#) (also in other languages)

References:

[Candidiasis | STI Guidelines Australia](#)



Acknowledgement of Country

Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life of this region.



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