

## *Trouble Down There*

You can get two kinds of infections "down there": sexually-transmitted infections, caused by bad bacteria from outside your body, and "regular" infections, caused by an imbalance in your normal good bacteria.

### Sexually-transmitted infections:

See a doctor if you have any of these:

- ▶ a sore on the skin, even if it doesn't hurt
- ▶ OR pain or blood when you pee or during sex
- ▶ OR pain low in your belly, especially when you walk, run, or drive over bumps.

These are signs of infections you can't treat at home. They can make you very sick, so go to the doctor right away.

### Regular infections:

These are very common, and include "bacterial vaginosis" and "vaginal yeast." They cause...

- ▶ runny discharge with strong fishy smell
- ▶ AND/OR white clumpy itchy discharge
- ▶ BUT NO sores, belly pain, or pain when you pee.

You can usually fix these at home. See below.

### What causes them?

Your private parts normally have good bacteria. They make acid, which keeps bad bacteria and yeast away. If the good bacteria are killed off or out-numbered, bad bacteria and yeast can take over. Then you have an infection. A lot of women get these over and over again. It is possible that the medication we use to kill the infection, kills off the good bacteria too. So even if you take medication for regular infections, you need to protect the good bacteria and the acid environment "down there."

***Good bacteria + acid = healthy***  
***Bad bacteria/yeast + no acid = UNhealthy***

### Three steps to good health "down there":

1. Don't douche, don't take a lot of bubble baths, and don't scrub down there with soap - you can use plain water. Keep it a little cool and dry: wear plain cotton underwear in the daytime, and don't wear any at night. It's better to change your underwear often, than to use panty liners. Change your tampons at least 4 times a day (morning, noon, end of the day, bedtime).

### 2. Replace the good bacteria:

You can buy Acidophilus capsules at a vitamin store. "Acidophilus" is another name for the good bacteria. You would put two capsules in the vagina at bedtime every night for one week.

OR you can buy organic plain yogurt, which has a special kind of Acidophilus. Do not buy the flavored kind (no sugar!). Wash your hands, stir up the yogurt, dip your finger in it, and insert into the vagina, twice a day for a week.

### 3. Replace the acid:

Take a small bath (hip-deep) with 1/2 cup vinegar or lemon juice added to the water, ten minutes, twice a day, for a week,

OR squat over a bowl of water with vinegar or lemon juice in it, and splash it up into the area, twice a day for a week,

OR mix 1 cup water with 2 tablespoons vinegar or lemon juice, and GENTLY squirt it into the vagina using a large ear syringe (looks like a rubber bulb as big as your fist), twice a day for a week. You can do this squatting in the tub or sitting on the toilet. Wear a panty liner for one hour afterward, in case some fluid drains out later.

OR you can put one tablet of Vitamin C (250 mg - or half of a 500 mg tablet) deep in the vagina, at bedtime nightly, for a week.

OR you can also buy a product called "Rephresh," which is vaginal jelly with a little acid in it. You can get it over-the-counter at a drugstore or grocery store. It costs \$20 for three applications, enough for one week.

...You can do all three steps instead of using prescription medicine. If they don't work, you can still try medicine and repeat the three steps at the same time. If any of the steps cause discomfort, tell your doctor. They might be able to find a sore or injury you can't see.

## *What is a normal discharge?*

It's the vagina's way of keeping you clean and healthy.

- ▶ It doesn't itch or burn.
- ▶ It smells fresh.
- ▶ It's white or yellowish. It can be sticky, or milky, or more like clear jelly.

You might have more normal discharge when you are fertile (2 weeks before your period) and when you are pregnant. This is normal!