

# YOUR HEALTH DOWN THERE

How to take care of the female genitalia

When it comes to reproductive health, many of us are guilty of not giving it the proper TLC.

While we all know that it's one of the aspects that we should never neglect, most women tend to forget the importance of regular checkup, proper hygiene, and the right products that won't disturb its microbial balance. You see, when this happens, not only will it cause pain and discomfort down there, it can also pose greater problems in the long run. We consulted obstetrician-gynecologist, **Bernadette Ong-Sumo**, M.D. and here are the five common vulvovaginal infections and how to avoid them.

## 1. Candidiasis

Commonly known as vaginal yeast infection, candidiasis is recognized to affect three out of four women at least once in their lifetime. This happens when a change in the natural microflora of the body affects the number of good bacteria leading to the overgrowth of a type of fungus called *Candida* which is normally found inside the human gut, throat, mouth, and even vagina. Symptoms include vaginal itching or soreness (burning sensation), pain during sexual intercourse or urinating, and changes in normal vaginal discharge described as curd-like or cottage cheese-type. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, women who are pregnant, using contraceptives, have diabetes, impaired immune system, or even those who are taking broad-spectrum antibiotics are much more likely to develop candidiasis.

Wearing cotton underwear and non-tight-fitting clothes might help reduce the chances of getting a yeast infection. Because taking antibiotics can lead to

vaginal candidiasis, take these medicines only when prescribed and exactly as your physician tells you. Often times, a vaginal yeast infection will clear up on its own, but over the counter, anti-fungal creams or tablets are available for treatment. "For those who choose self-treatment, please see a gynecologist if symptoms persist," advised by Dr. Ong-Sumo.

## 2. Vaginosis

Vaginosis, much like candidiasis, is a type of vaginal inflammation caused by an upset vaginal balance, from lactobacilli-dominant to mixed flora. If you're noticing a thin, frothy, gray-white vaginal discharge and a foul-smelling vaginal odor described as "musty" or "fishy," make sure to get checked by your gynecologist.

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Sometimes, women with this infection may experience vaginal itching or burning sensation when urinating. Although it is more common among women in their reproductive years, a couple of factors are known to increase the risk of developing this infection such as smoking, multiple sexual partners, and douching or the practice of washing the vagina with a mixture of water and vinegar or baking soda. "Frequent douching for hygiene is unnecessary as the vagina does an excellent job of keeping the PH balanced and of cleansing itself," revealed by Dr. Ong-Sumo.

## 3. Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

Women's risk of acquiring at least one

incidence of UTI during their lifetime is 50 percent. UTI is caused by bacteria entering through the urethra and invading the bladder and kidneys. Because women have a shorter urethra than males, bacteria can easily travel to the bladder thus they are known to develop a greater risk of acquiring this infection. And anyone who had this before knows that it can feel like the worst thing in the whole world: a burning sensation when urinating, strong-smelling urine, urine that appears to be cloudy or red, and pelvic pain that may linger around the center of the pelvis or around the pubic bone. Moreover, sexual activity, the use of diaphragms for birth control measure, and menopause are some of the other risk factors associated with UTI. Drinking a

ton of water helps to dilute the urine and will flush away bacteria even before the infection begins. Additionally, as a part of keeping down there "dry and happy," wipe from front to back after urinating or defecating. This way, bacteria from the feces or anus will not spread toward the vagina and urethra. Additionally, emptying the bladder after intercourse is also a must so you don't introduce more bacteria.

## 4. Folliculitis

Dr. Ong-Sumo says, "This is becoming more common nowadays as a lot of women in this day and age are into extensive pubic hair removal, whether waxing or shaving." Hair removal causes minute skin injuries, with inoculation of pathogens and subsequent spread of infection. Folliculitis happens when bacteria, normally present in the skin or vagina, get inside a cut or opening. It exhibits itself as groups of red bumps with white heads and pus or oozing blisters. "These women just need to be informed of the risks

and of the safe methods and best practices for hair removal", added by Dr. Ong-Sumo.

If shaving cannot at all be prevented, do so every other day with warm water; a shaving cream, and new razors, while making sure to apply moisturizing lotion afterward. Wearing breathable clothes, using clean towels, and avoiding sharing personal items are other precautionary steps we can take to prevent this infection from invading our personal space. It's best to wash the infected area with warm water and antibacterial soap. Dry thoroughly with a fresh towel and apply antibiotic creams or gels. Women who fail to respond to topical antibiotics should consult with a physician.

## 5. Bartholin's Gland Abscess

A Bartholin's abscess is caused by a fluid buildup in the Bartholin gland (responsible for secreting fluids to lubricate the vestibule and vagina) due to an obstruction caused by infection or injury. The pus often shows polymicrobial infection and contain a wide range of bacteria homogeneous to the normal flora of the vagina. Symptoms include acute vulvar pain, pain during intercourse, difficulty in walking or sitting and sometimes, fever. Safer sex practices and good hygiene habits may help to prevent infection of a cyst and the formation of an abscess.

The good news is that these five-common infection-related reproductive diseases are completely avoidable and treatable. Because these diseases should be taken seriously, Dr. Ong-Sumo's final recommendation is to consistently practice good personal hygiene from wearing a cotton underwear for better absorption of moisture and perspiration, keeping



yourself dry and clean, avoiding scented feminine wash, pads or tampons, to tight-fitting pants and jeans, will reduce the risk of developing these infections. And according to the words of our discerning doctor, "Making yogurt with live cultures a regular part of your diet might help to restore a healthful yeast balance in the vagina."

On top of these best practices, opt for an unscented and 100 percent sterilized virgin cotton material for your sanitary pad like Jeunesse Anion. In a laboratory test conducted by the Institute of Chemistry, UP Diliman in correlation with previously published scientific studies and journals, it validates that Jeunesse Anion pad's specifically modified cellulose-based hydrogels are not only super-absorbent, hypoallergenic, and non-toxic, but also exhibits anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, and odor-reducing benefits! The positive ions embedded in the material attracts the negatively charged bacterial cells, which dramatically results to cell death thus declining bacterial population by 99.9 percent. But remember that a regular visit to your OB-Gyn will ensure your reproductive health is in tip-top shape!