

BV

BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS

Bacterial vaginosis—or BV—is the most common vaginal infection in women ages 15–44. Here's what you need to know.



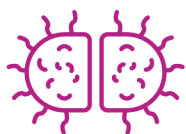
IT'S ABOUT BALANCE

In a healthy vagina, there is a balance among many kinds of bacteria. Some kinds of bacteria are considered "helpful" while others are "less helpful." Helpful bacteria help keep the vagina a little bit acidic. This keeps less helpful bacteria from growing too fast. **Sometimes, the less helpful bacteria can take over**, and the result may be BV.



IT AFFECTS A LOT OF WOMEN

It's estimated that about 29% of women ages 15–44 in the United States have BV. That's about 21.2 million women. Any woman can get BV, but there are some things that increase a woman's risk, like douching or having new or multiple sex partners.



IT CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS IF UNTREATED

Correct diagnosis is important. Untreated, **BV can increase a woman's risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV**. Pregnant women can face additional problems, as BV may cause babies to be born early or with low birth weight.

SYMPTOMS

Many women who have BV don't experience any symptoms at all. But some typical symptoms a woman may have are:

- Itching and irritation in and around the vagina
- An unusual discharge
- A strong odor, often described as fish-like

GETTING TESTED AND TREATED

While it can be tempting to self-diagnose and self-treat with over-the-counter products, it's easy to misdiagnose the problem. **Only a health care provider can accurately diagnose BV**. Your provider will likely perform an exam and take a sample of vaginal discharge. The provider may examine the sample under a microscope in the office or send it to a lab to be tested.

BV can be treated with antibiotics, including a one-day, one-dose treatment. However BV can come back in the months after treatment, so if symptoms come back, talk to a provider.



KEEPING YOUR VAGINA HEALTHY

Fortunately, **the vagina is designed to keep itself clean with natural, healthy vaginal secretions**. You can keep your vagina healthy with the same things that keep your whole body healthy—regular hygiene and a good diet. Here are a few basic tips:

DON'T DOUCHE



While some think douching keeps the vagina clean, it actually does more harm than good. **Douching upsets the natural balance of the vagina** and may make a woman more prone to vaginal infections.

KEEP CLEAN



Wash your vaginal area with **mild, unscented soap**. There is no need to use anything special to clean the vulva and vagina. Also remember to wipe from front to back to avoid spreading germs.

GET HELP



If you have symptoms of an infection, like discharge or irritation, **see a provider**. It may be BV, or it may be another problem like a yeast infection or an STI. Only a provider can make a correct diagnosis.