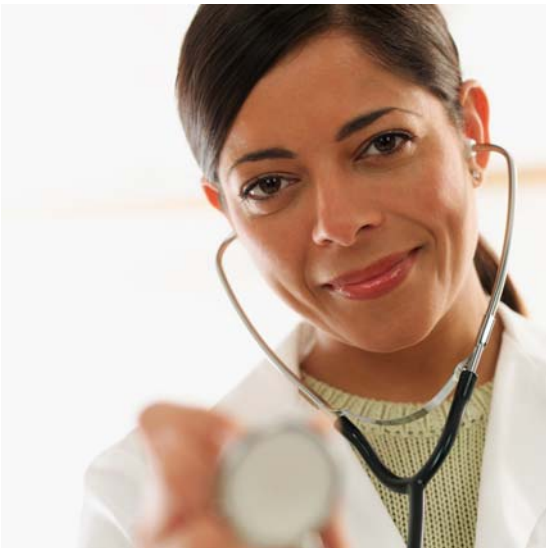


- **Don't douche.** Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protects you from infection. This may increase your chances of getting BV. It may also increase the chances of BV reoccurring after treatment.
- **Talk with your sex partner(s) about STIs and using condoms.** It's up to you to make sure you are protected.
- **Talk frankly with your doctor or nurse and about any STIs you and your partner have or had.** Discuss any genital discharge.
- **Have regular pelvic exams.** Talk with your doctor about how often you need them. Many STI tests can be done during an exam.
- **Get tested for BV if you are pregnant and have symptoms of BV or had a premature delivery or low birth weight baby in the past.** Get tested as soon as you think you may be pregnant.
- **Finish your medication.** Finish all the medication you have been given to treat BV. You still need to finish all the medication even if all the symptoms have gone away.



National Women's Health Information Centre

# CU Healthy

**HCS** wants to CU Healthy! The Health Promotion Team at HCS tries to achieve this through our:

- Resource Centre
- Student Peer Interns
- Health Promotion Advisory Committee
- Website ([carleton.ca/health](http://carleton.ca/health))
- Facebook page
- Newsletters, class presentations, workshops and more . . .

The Health Promotion Team promotes healthy lifestyles and wellness and can provide you with information about stress, colds, nutrition, sexuality, alcohol, etc. Contact the Resource Centre for more information at 613-520-2600 ext. 6544 or [cu\\_healthy@carleton.ca](mailto:cu_healthy@carleton.ca).



2600 CTTC Building  
613-520-6674  
[carleton.ca/health](http://carleton.ca/health)

# Bacterial Vaginosis



613-520-6674  
[carleton.ca/health](http://carleton.ca/health)  
2600 CTTC Building

## What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is the most common vaginal infection in women of childbearing age. It happens when the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is disrupted and replaced by an overgrowth of certain bacteria. The vagina normally contains mostly “good” bacteria, and fewer “harmful” bacteria. BV develops when there is an increase in “harmful” bacteria and “fewer” good bacteria.

## What causes BV?

The cause of BV is not understood. It can develop when something, like sexual contact, disrupts the balance between the good bacteria that protect the vagina from infection and the harmful bacteria that don't. It is not clear what role sexual activity plays in the development of BV, but BV is more common among women who have had vaginal sex. However, BV is not always from sexual contact. Certain things can upset the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina and put you more at risk for BV. These include:

- Having a new or multiple sexual partners
- Douching
- Using an intrauterine device (IUD)
- Not using a condom

You cannot get BV from toilet seats, bedding, swimming pool, or from touching objects around you.

## What are the signs of BV?

Women with BV may have abnormal vaginal discharge with an unpleasant odour. Some women report a strong fish-like odour, especially after sexual intercourse. The discharge can be white

(milky) or gray and thin. Other symptoms may include burning when urinating, itching around the outside of the vagina, and irritation. However, these could be symptoms of another infection too. Some women with BV have no symptoms at all.

## How can I find out if I have BV?

There is a test to find out if you have BV. Your doctor takes a sample of fluid from your vagina for testing. Your doctor may also be able to see signs of BV, like a grayish-white discharge, during the examination of the vagina.

## How is BV treated?

BV is treated with antibiotics. Your doctor may give you either metronidazole or clindamycin. Generally, male sex partners of women with BV do not need to be treated. You can get BV again even after being treated.

## Is it safe to treat pregnant women who have BV?

All pregnant women with BV symptoms or who have had a premature delivery or low birth weight baby in the past should be tested for BV and treated if they have it. The same antibiotics used to treat non-pregnant women can be used safely during pregnancy. The amount of antibiotic a woman takes during pregnancy may be different than the amount taken if not pregnant.

## Can BV cause medical problems?

BV doesn't cause any problems in most cases. However, some problems can arise if BV is untreated.

- **Pregnancy problems.** BV can cause premature delivery and low birth weight babies (less

than five pounds).

- **PID.** Pelvic inflammatory disease or PID is an infection that can affect a woman's uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes, which carry eggs from the ovaries to the uterus. Having BV increases the risk of getting PID after a surgical procedure such as a hysterectomy or an abortion.
- **Higher risk of getting other STIs.** Having BV can increase the chances of getting other STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV. Women with HIV who get BV increase the chances of passing HIV to a sexual partner.

## How can I prevent BV?

BV is not well understood by scientists, and the best ways to prevent it are unknown. What is known is that BV is associated with having a new sexual partner or having multiple sex partners. Follow these tips to lower your risk of getting BV:

- **Abstinence.** The best way to prevent any STI is to practice abstinence - no vaginal, oral or anal sex.
- **Monogamy.** Having a sexual relationship with one partner reduces your chances of infection. Only have sex with each other and no one else.
- **Use Condoms.** Protect yourself with a condom EVERY time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex. Condoms should be used for any type of sex with every partner. Use a latex male condom or a female polyurethane condom for vaginal sex. Use a latex male condom for anal sex. Use a latex male condom for oral sex on a man and use a dental dam for oral sex on a woman. A dental dam is a rubbery material placed over the anus or vagina before sexual contact.