

feminine health



Answers  
at *Walgreens*®



## Answers about feminine health begin here.

A healthy urinary tract and reproductive system are important to a woman's overall health and well-being. This booklet discusses how to manage common infections and maintain daily health and hygiene. You will also learn some basic facts about making the transition to menopause.



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## What is the best way to ensure good feminine health?

- The vagina has a natural process by which to clean itself.<sup>1</sup> Shower daily or more often if needed. Gently wash your vaginal area with a mild, perfume-free soap and water, and rinse well.
- Stay away from abrasive soaps and washcloths, as well as scented tampons, pads, powders and sprays. These products may increase your chances of getting a vaginal infection.<sup>2</sup>

## What products can help with my daily hygiene?

- Feminine hygiene products such as washes, wipes, powders and sprays can help you feel and smell fresh and clean. Many of these products have been tested by gynecologists and dermatologists. However, washing every day with a mild soap and plenty of warm water is enough to ensure proper hygiene for most people.<sup>3</sup> Speak with your healthcare provider if you have questions about whether or not feminine hygiene products are right for your needs.
- Some feminine hygiene products with chemicals and perfumes can cause irritation in the genital area. This can increase the risk for other problems, such as infections. If you are concerned about vaginal odor or discharge, speak to your healthcare provider.<sup>4</sup>
- Avoid douching unless your doctor recommends it, since douching can increase your risk of infection.<sup>5</sup> When you have your period, change sanitary pads and tampons every four to six hours, or as needed.<sup>6</sup>

# yeast infections



## What is a yeast infection?

A yeast infection is a common infection of the vagina, usually caused by a fungus called *candida*. Symptoms can include itching and irritation of the vagina, burning, redness, swelling, pain when urinating, soreness, and vaginal discharge or rash. These symptoms may be similar to other types of genital infections, so see your healthcare provider if you have any of these symptoms. <sup>7</sup>

## What causes yeast infections?

- Medicines such as antibiotics
- High estrogen levels caused by pregnancy or hormone replacement therapy
- Health problems like diabetes, obesity or an impaired immune system
- Anything that changes the balance of bacteria and yeast in the vagina, such as douching or irritation from poor vaginal lubrication



## How do I treat a yeast infection?

If this is your first yeast infection, it is important to make an appointment with your healthcare provider to discuss treatment options before trying any OTC remedy. However, if you are in good health and have been diagnosed with a yeast infection before, you can use OTC anti-fungal creams, vaginal inserts and ointments. Prescription medications are also available. If you are not healthy, or if you have any concerns, speak with your healthcare provider.<sup>8</sup>





## How can I prevent yeast infections?

- Maintain good overall health and immunity by eating a well-balanced diet, with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meat, poultry, fish or low-fat dairy products.
- Eat yogurt that contains helpful bacteria, called probiotics, that can help prevent yeast infections.
- Practice good vaginal hygiene.
- Wipe front to back after using the toilet.
- Avoid using douches, scented tampons and perfumed feminine hygiene products.
- Change tampons and pads often during your period.
- Wear cotton underwear and avoid tight clothing, such as tights and skin-tight jeans.
- Change out of wet clothing as soon as possible.<sup>9</sup>
- Avoid hot tubs and baths that are too hot.<sup>10</sup>





## **What are the differences between a one-, three- and seven-day anti-fungal product?**

Choosing between one, three or seven days of treatment for yeast infection is often a matter of personal preference. Regardless of what you choose to do, it may take up to five to seven days to feel complete relief from your symptoms. If symptoms don't improve after seven days, see your healthcare provider.<sup>11</sup> Products labeled natural, homeopathic or probiotic are not FDA-approved as being safe or effective.<sup>12</sup> Avoid using anti-fungal products with a tampon; do not douche; avoid intercourse; and don't use spermicides or other vaginal products during treatment.<sup>13,14</sup>

# urinary tract infections



## What is a urinary tract infection?

The urinary tract includes the urethra, bladder, uterus and kidneys. A urinary tract infection (UTI) develops when bacteria, or germs, enter the urinary tract. The most common UTIs in women affect the bladder and urethra. UTIs are usually caused by bacteria from the bowel.



## Who is at risk for a UTI?

- Women are at higher risk than men because they have a shorter urethra. This makes it easier for bacteria to reach a woman's bladder.
- People with an abnormality in the urinary tract, or those who have difficulty emptying their bladder completely.
- Sexually active women and those who use diaphragms and spermicidal agents.
- People with diabetes or other diseases that may impair the immune system.<sup>15</sup>



## How do I know if I have a UTI?

Symptoms of a UTI can vary from person to person. Some people have no symptoms. Common symptoms of a UTI include the following:

- Frequent and strong urges to urinate, yet only passing small amounts of urine.
- Burning sensation when urinating.
- Cloudy, dark or bloody urine that has a foul smell.
- High fever, shaking and chills, back or side pain, nausea and vomiting could mean the infection has spread to the kidneys.

If you think you might have a UTI, there are OTC tests you can use before seeing your healthcare provider. If the test shows that you do have a UTI, make an appointment with your healthcare provider right away.<sup>15,16</sup>

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### Cranberry and UTIs

Recent studies show that taking cranberry juice or any food containing cranberry on a regular basis may help prevent UTIs in women. Talk to your healthcare provider about using cranberry juice or related products to prevent UTIs.<sup>17</sup>





## How do I treat a UTI?

Once your healthcare provider confirms that you have a UTI, you are likely to get a prescription for antibiotics. The type and length of treatment depends on your current infection and history of UTIs. Over-the-counter or prescription urinary pain relievers can relieve painful UTI symptoms.<sup>18</sup>

## How can I prevent UTIs?

You can decrease your chances of developing a UTI by taking some simple steps:

- Drink plenty of water. Most people should drink six to eight glasses of water a day.
- Urinate often. Go when you have the urge. Holding it can allow bacteria to grow.
- Urinate soon after sexual intercourse and drink a full glass of water to help flush bacteria.
- Wipe from front to back after you go to the bathroom.
- Wear clean cotton underwear and loose clothing.
- Take showers instead of baths.
- If you use a diaphragm, spermicide or unlubricated condoms for birth control, speak with your healthcare provider about other options that can lower your risk of a UTI.<sup>19,20</sup>

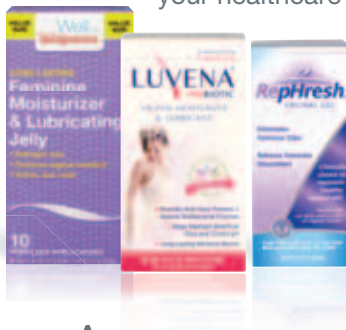
# common conditions



## What causes vaginal dryness and how is it treated?

- Vaginal dryness is most often caused by low estrogen levels due to menopause, breastfeeding and childbirth.
- OTC, water-based vaginal lubricants and moisturizers can provide some relief for several to 24 hours. Water-based lubricants can help with dryness during sex and are safe to use with diaphragms and condoms.
- If low estrogen levels are the cause of dryness, your doctor might prescribe estrogen cream, tablets or suppositories.
- If you have other symptoms of menopause in addition to vaginal dryness, such as hot flashes, talk to your healthcare provider about

the risks and benefits of hormone therapy.<sup>21</sup>







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### Vaginal pH

The term pH describes the acidity of a substance. It is measured on a scale of 1 to 14. A pH of 1 is the most acidic.<sup>22</sup> A vaginal pH above 4.5 can be associated with infection.<sup>23</sup> Certain OTC products might help you maintain a healthy vaginal pH. These include pH-balancing tampons and gels, washes and probiotic supplements.<sup>24</sup> Ask your healthcare provider if any of these products are right for you.

## What causes feminine itching?

- Feminine itching can be caused by chemicals that are found in detergents, fabric softeners, contraceptive foams and jellies and feminine products, including sprays, ointments, creams and douches.
- Stress may worsen vaginal itching and make you more likely to get infections. Vaginal dryness that occurs during menopause due to reduced estrogen can cause itching.
- Vaginal yeast is also associated with itching.<sup>27</sup>





## What is menopause?

Menopause is when a woman's period stops permanently. This happens when the ovaries stop producing eggs. In most cases, this is a natural change. It can occur as early as age 40 or as late as age 55.<sup>28</sup>

Once a woman has not had a period for one year, she is considered to be in menopause.<sup>29</sup>



## What is perimenopause?

The transition to menopause is called perimenopause. The length of this transition is different for each woman. Perimenopause may last anywhere from two to eight years.<sup>30</sup> During this time, a woman's periods may stop and then start again.

## What can I do for hot flashes ?

If hot flashes/night sweats interfere with your daily activities, here are some practical steps that might help to ease them:



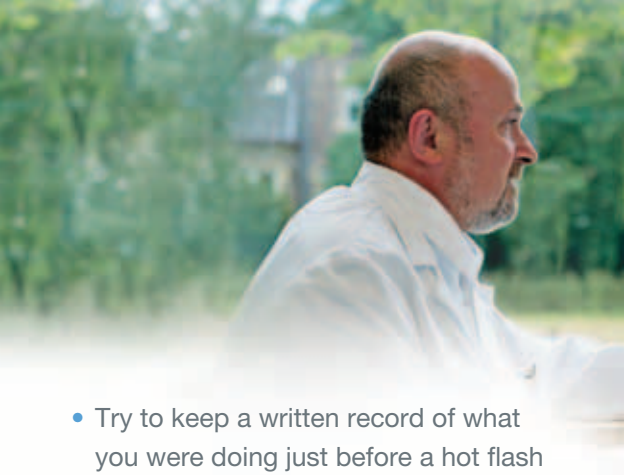
- Sleep in a cool room.
- Dress in layers, which can be removed at the start of a hot flash.
- Have a drink of cold water or juice when you feel a hot flash coming on.
- Use sheets and clothing that let your skin “breathe.”<sup>31</sup>

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Menopausal symptoms often begin during perimenopause. They can include:

- Hot flashes
- Mood changes
- Vaginal dryness
- Urinary problems
- Sleeping problems
- Memory problems

Eating well and staying active can help improve your sleep, mood and memory.<sup>28</sup>



- Try to keep a written record of what you were doing just before a hot flash started. This might show you what the triggers are for your hot flashes, and you could then try to avoid them.
- Exercise, since this may help with hot flashes and certainly will help improve your quality of life. It will also help reduce your risk of heart disease and osteoporosis.
- Stop smoking and lose excess weight.
- Try slow, deep breathing, known as relaxation breathing.<sup>31</sup>
- Some types of hormone therapy might help with hot flashes and night sweats. However, these are not without risk of other health problems, such as blood clots, heart disease, stroke and breast cancer.<sup>32</sup>
- Some women try herbal products to help relieve hot flashes.<sup>33</sup>



## What should I speak about with my healthcare provider?

Speak to your healthcare provider about the best options to help you deal with your menopause symptoms. Treatments generally have both risks and benefits, and hormone changes affect every woman differently, so it is important to discuss what's best for you. If you miss a couple of periods, don't assume the cause is menopause. It is possible that symptoms often associated with menopause are actually caused by other health conditions. Your healthcare provider can help you find the cause.<sup>34</sup> Also, check with your healthcare provider if you have not had a period for a year and then start "spotting," because this could be related to other health issues.<sup>35</sup>

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## Questions about which products are right for feminine health?

Walgreens pharmacists can help you determine the best feminine health products for your individual needs. Consult with one of our knowledgeable pharmacists in store or log on to **Walgreens.com/PharmacyChat** to chat with a live pharmacist anytime, day or night.