Dear Alice,

I am a 26 year old female and have started getting a yeast infection every month without fail at the end of my period. This started about a year ago and I’ve cut back on eating bread, I don't eat much sugar and I rarely drink beer. I read online that someone recommended using a douche just before and after starting my period. Is this a reasonable thing to try? I've always been very opposed to douching but I'm sick of the itching and don't want to have to take medication or use cream every month. Any suggestions?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Yeast infections are very common (three out of four women get one at some point!), but it's unusual that your itching returns month after month. Since changing your diet and using creams haven't helped, now is a good time to visit a women's health care provider. Together, you two can figure out what's triggering your infections and put a stop to the itching.

The telltale signs of a yeast infection include vaginal itching, burning, and a "cheesy" white discharge. If you've been diagnosed with a yeast infection before, then you're probably familiar with these symptoms. However, discomfort down below or an unusual discharge may indicate another problem like bacterial vaginosis or a sexually transmitted infection (STI) such as chlamydia or trichomoniasis. Recurring yeast infections can also signal an underlying health issue like diabetes or anemia. A health care provider can confirm your suspicion of a recurring yeast infection and/or rule out other possible causes of your symptoms.

Yeast infections tend to crop up when your vagina's pH is off-balance. A variety of factors like antibiotics, stress, smoking, and hormonal changes caused by pregnancy or birth control can aggravate the vagina and allow yeast to multiply. Have you switched to a different brand of tampon or pad? Scented menstrual products can trigger a yeast infection. For more tips on maintaining a healthy, happy vagina see Yeast infection prevention [2] and other questions in the Go Ask Alice! archive for Sexual Health [3].
As you know, there are several treatment options for yeast infections. Your approach of cutting back on sugary foods and carbs may help symptoms clear up faster. However, contrary to what you read online, douching is not recommended. Douching, perfumed sprays, and overzealous cleansing interfere with the vagina’s self-cleaning process and may actually create a hospitable environment for yeast to flourish.

To find out what’s troubling you and get proper treatment, make a trip to a health care provider. During your visit, describe your symptoms, the timing of your infections, and the treatments you’ve tried. The provider can check for a yeast or other type of infection by taking a sample of your vaginal fluid with a quick swab. Once your test results are in, your provider can prescribe the right treatment for you. Although your symptoms are recurring, it's possible that a one-time treatment could end your itching for good by eliminating the underlying infection.

Many yeast infections can be easily treated at home, but a monthly bout of itching is certainly worth a check-up. Hopefully you get some relief soon!

Alice!

Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health [4]
Women's Sexual Health [5]

Related questions

Condom broke and I’m feeling itchy [6]
Sexual transmission of a yeast infection? [7]
Getting rid of a yeast infection [8]
Chronic yeast infections? [9]
What is bacterial vaginosis? [10]

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [12]
Medical Services (CUMC) [13]

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