

A fungus among us: Candida (yeast) ^[1]

Alice,

Candida lives in one's intestines, but it may "escape" into the body and cause all kinds of vague complaints. Could you tell me more about it: how to detect it, its symptoms and cure (diet)?

Thanks,
T.

Answer

Dear T.,

Candida, the scientific name for yeast, occurs naturally in our bodies. Usually, our immune systems can keep yeast levels in balance with the rest of our internal flora and fauna. But sometimes, when a person gets sick or takes antibiotics, for example, the amount of yeast in the body dramatically increases, making an infection more likely. Some conditions thought to be the result of *Candida*'s activity have been supported by research. At the same time, there's a lack of evidence to support other conditions that claim yeast overgrowth as a cause as well as certain regimens, like dietary changes, to treat it.

Candida grows best in warm, moist body areas (i.e. mucous membranes) and mildly acidic environments. Multiple pregnancies, diabetes, menstruation, and taking birth control pills and some antibiotics can cause the body's pH level to be more acidic than ideal, providing a favorable environment for yeast growth. Those particularly at risk for yeast overgrowth are very-low-birth weight babies, patients undergoing surgery, patients with a central venous catheter, and those with compromised immune systems. The list of conditions claimed to be associated with an overgrowth of *Candida* is long and ranges wide. Health issues that studies show are related to yeast include:

- [Thrush](#) ^[2] (a yeast infection that causes white patches in your mouth)
- [Vaginitis](#) ^[3]
- [Athlete's foot](#) ^[4]

Other conditions have been associated with *Candida*, but evidence is lacking to link it to these

symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Depression
- Constipation and bloating
- Migraine headaches
- Allergies to perfumes, chemical odors, and tobacco smoke
- Joint swelling

Many of the symptoms above can be caused by conditions other than a proliferation of yeast, but a yeast infection can be diagnosed rather easily by examining a sample from the affected area under a microscope by your health care provider. As you noted in your question, one approach that has been presented to treat excess yeast activity is through diet. The basic idea is that eating foods with high probiotic content (mostly fermented foods like yogurt, kombucha, kefir, sauerkraut), and avoiding refined sugars and flours can help keep your body's yeast levels in check. Additional suggestions include limiting the amount of yeasty foods (like bread and beer) you consume. However, eater beware — not all of the claims made about “The Candida diet” have been rigorously tested for effectiveness.

Perhaps because *Candida* has had its time in the spotlight and as awareness of diet, hormones in our food, and use of antibiotics has increased, self-diagnosis can be tempting. However, a visit to your health care provider is the most reliable way to receive an accurate diagnosis and to start appropriate treatment (which will depend on the type of overgrowth you have). Check out the related Q&As for more information about yeast infections, prevention, and treatment.

If nothing else, at *yeast* you learned a bit more about this fungus among us.

Alice!

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