Dear Alice,

I am a healthy 17-year-old runner who has never had a yeast infection but I'm scared I might get one some day. I've heard rumors about what to do to prevent them, like wear cotton underwear, don't wear spandex, and eat yogurt. Are these good ideas? Is there anything else I can do to prevent a yeast infection?

— Healthy Woman

Answer

Dear Healthy Woman,

Yeast, along with a mix of healthy bacteria, is something that’s normally found in the body, including the vaginal canal. When the balance of these are thrown off, yeast can sometimes grow out of hand and result in an infection. Based on some of the strategies you’ve mentioned, it seems you might referring to vaginal yeast infections specifically. However, you might also be interested to know that there are other conditions associated with the overgrowth of yeast in the body, including thrush (an oral yeast infection) and athlete’s foot. In any case, yeast infections may be uncomfortable wherever they occur, but often aren’t difficult to treat and manage. While you need not spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about getting a yeast infection, it’s smart to think about how to prevent one. In fact, you seem privy to a few promising strategies already. For more to add to your prevention toolkit, read on!

To prevent a yeast infection, consider these general tips:

- **Support your immune system.** Following a nutritious eating plan and getting enough sleep can help keep your body’s defenses in tip-top shape [2], making you less prone to infection. This can include eating yogurt that contains live cultures of *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, which has been shown to be beneficial in counteracting yeast overgrowth [3].
- **Take a pass on using scented, deodorant, and antibacterial products in and around the genital area.** These include soaps, sprays, powders, toilet paper, tampons, or other hygiene products.
- **Wear pads or panty-liners only when menstruating or spotting.**
- **Avoid the use of douches.** Douching may alter the healthy balance of bacteria in the vagina and could spread any existing vaginal infections to the uterus and fallopian tubes, causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).
- **Only take antibiotics when necessary and indicated by a medical professional.** Similar to douching, antibiotics can throw off the normal balance of vaginal organisms.
- **Dump the damp and wet attire.** Change out of your swimming suit, sweaty clothes, and any other wet or damp clothes as soon as possible. Warm and moist environments are prime breeding grounds for yeast.
- **Practice proper wiping techniques after using the toilet.** Remember to always wipe from front to back and wipe thoroughly, but gently. Also, clean with water if you can and pat dry after. These habits will help to minimize the spread of fecal bacteria to the vagina that can disrupt the bacteria/yeast balance.

Because cotton breathes more easily than synthetic fabrics, many folks find that wearing cotton underwear reduces their risk of developing a vaginal yeast infection. Avoiding tight fitting clothing may also help by decreasing body heat and moisture in the vaginal area.

At the very *yeast*, you can take solace in the fact that there’s a lot you can do to stave off this undesirable experience. If you still feel concerned, consider talking with a health care provider who may be able to provide more targeted tips while taking your personal health history into account. To read even more about yeast infections, take a look at the related Q&As.

Congrats for focusing on prevention and run on!

Alice!

**Category:**
- Sexual & Reproductive Health [4]
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) [5]
- Yeast Infection [6]

**Related questions**

- Yeast infection with condom use? [7]
- Concerned about partner's yeast infection [8]
- Chronic yeast infections? [9]

**Resources**

- Medical Services (Morningside) [10]
- Medical Services (CUIMC) [11]

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