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Yogurt for yeast infections? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

How does eating yogurt help a yeast infection?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Although research is limited, there is some evidence that daily ingestion or vaginal application of yogurt containing *Lactobacillus acidophilus* may help to prevent and treat candidal vaginitis (a.k.a. yeast infections). A study published in the Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing ^[2] (JOGNN) reviewed current research and reported promising but inconclusive results about yogurt as an effective treatment for yeast infections.

The vagina stays healthy and yeast-free through a complex balancing act. Our bodies host lots of different microorganisms, many of which are useful in helping the body take care of business. Normally, these colonies of critters live in harmonious balance with one another. But sometimes this balance can be disrupted, among other things, by stress or the use of prescription antibiotics, causing some of the microorganisms to overpopulate and make a nuisance of themselves. When an imbalance occurs in the vagina, normally occurring colonies of *Candida albicans* can get out of control, leading to the tell-tale symptoms of a yeast infection: whitish discharge, burning and/or itching, and a yeasty odor (similar to beer or bread).

One of *Candida*'s vaginal neighbors is our friend *L. acidophilus*, which has the ability to keep the rowdy *Candida* in check (and thereby prevent yeast infections). Thus, introducing more *L. acidophilus* to the area when *Candida* is already out of control can help restore peace to the region. One way *L. acidophilus* wards off yeast infections is by producing lactic acid, which keeps the vagina's pH level low and inhospitable to *Candida*.

It just so happens that *L. acidophilus* can be found in yogurt (as long as the container says "live cultures" on it). If yogurt isn't your thing, taking *L. acidophilus* capsules also has been shown to help prevent yeast infections. Studies have shown that applying yogurt directly to the vagina (about one tablespoon via an applicator) can also fight yeast infections. Some women have long recommended this method for yeast infections. In any case, it is probably best to use plain,

unsweetened yogurt, especially if it's applied topically. Sugar is Candida's favorite food, so a healthy diet low in sugar, fats, and processed foods is good first step to a healthy vagina.

Although there's no hard and fast proof that yogurt will always cure a yeast infection, this natural remedy does have several advantages. Yogurt treatments are inexpensive, have a low risk of side effects, and don't encourage bacterial resistance.

If yogurt doesn't do the trick, a health care provider can recommend other treatment options for yeast infections, such as oral or topical anti-fungal medication. But thanks to the friendly bug *L. acidophilus*, when it comes to yeast infection prevention and treatment, some women might try a trip to the dairy section before a trip to the pharmacy!

Alice!

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