

Burning after sex without a condom ^[1]

Dear Alice,

A few months ago, my fiancé and I, after much consideration, decided to stop using condoms and rely only on the Pill as a contraceptive method. Since then, when he ejaculates inside my vagina, I frequently experience a strong burning sensation a few minutes afterward — varying in both degree and length each time. Could I be allergic to his semen? The pain sometimes subsides if I hold a wet cloth over the area. Sometimes, perhaps during a different part of my cycle, there is no discomfort. Does it have something to do with the pH level or something? It feels very chemical, somehow.

— Sex distressed

Answer

Dear Sex distressed,

Instead of basking in the afterglow of sex, it sounds as though you're agonizing over the after-burn. There are a number of possible explanations for the burning sensation you're feeling including (but not limited to) friction caused by insufficient lubrication, vaginitis, or a semen allergy. If your symptoms continue, you may want to talk with your health care provider for some answers and ways to address your concerns. Read on for more about some possible explanations for your discomfort and what steps you can take to help!

It's also possible that friction from sex irritates vaginal tissues, which can cause discomfort. Among many potential reasons for vaginal dryness, it's a side effect of some hormonal birth control methods. To combat friction and prevent vaginal irritation, you may consider adding water-based lubrication into the mix during sex. Additionally, this irritation may make you more susceptible to infections. For both you and your boyfriend, washing your hands and genitals before you have sex helps remove any bacteria or germs. You might also try peeing both before and after intercourse — the acidity of the urine tends to kill off and wash away bacteria.

Vaginitis is an inflammation of the vagina that's often associated with abnormal discharge, mild or severe itching or burning of the vulva, chafing of the thighs, or frequent urination. This condition could be a reaction to new products you've used such as lotion, spray, spermicide, or detergent,

among others. Vaginitis may also be due to a number of conditions such as bacterial vaginosis, a yeast infection, or sexually transmitted infections (STI). Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is caused by an overgrowth of existing bacteria in the vagina. Symptoms may include a fish-like smell accompanied by a thin, milky discharge, while some individuals experience no symptoms. Yeast infections, on the other hand, are caused by an overgrowth of the fungus *Candida*, which can be found in the vagina, mouth, and digestive tract. Individuals with a yeast infection may experience a red or itchy vulva followed by thick white vaginal discharge. The proliferation of these bacteria in BV and fungi in yeast infections may be due to changes in balance inside the vagina. STIs such as chlamydia, [gonorrhea](#) [2], and [trichomoniasis](#) [3] may also lead to vaginitis (to read more about STIs, check out the [Sexually Transmitted Infections](#) [4] category in the *Go Ask Alice! Sexual & Reproductive Health* [5] archives). Because vaginitis has a number of different causes, a medical professional can diagnose and properly treat the particular culprit.

Another possible culprit is a semen allergy. Individuals with semen allergies often react to the proteins in the seminal fluid, not the sperm. Symptoms like burning, pain, and swelling typically start 20 to 30 minutes after contact and can vary in severity and duration. To find out if your reaction is a reaction to the seminal fluid, allergy testing may be required.

Other possible triggers are lowered immune resistance, douching, birth control pills, antibiotics, or cuts and abrasions. Since there are a number of possible causes for your pain and burning, talking with your health care provider about determining the cause is your best bet for addressing this burning sensation.

Alice!

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