



SAY FAREWELL TO THRUSH

Thrush is the word most often used to describe an annoying fungal infection caused by the organism known as *Candida albicans*. Thus, other names for thrush are candidiasis or simply candida.

The yeast-like fungus that causes thrush lives within the intestines of most healthy people. Our immune system, and certain harmless bacteria also happily living with us, usually stop *Candida* from becoming a problem.

Nevertheless, when circumstances are such that this balance of power between the micro-organisms on and inside our body is disturbed, thrush can become a major source of irritation.

The areas that *Candida* finds most attractive are the warm, moist, airless part of the body. This is why the vagina is the most common site; but thrush can also develop in other areas such as the mouth, the armpits, under the breast, the groin and the nappy area in babies.

Symptoms of vaginal thrush include a change in the vaginal discharge (it can become creamy white and cottage-cheese like), a burning sensation when passing urine, and itching, soreness and swelling around the vagina. There might also be discomfort and pain during intercourse. Men can also get thrush - more likely in uncircumcised men who still have a foreskin which provides moist conditions for the *Candida* to grow.

Any female can get vaginal thrush. In fact most women will experience

at least one thrush infection in their life; and there are certain situations which make us more likely to get thrush. These are situations that alter or upset our natural defences and allow overgrowth to occur.

These increased risk factors include: diabetes, antibiotic treatment, using hormone treatment such as the contraceptive pill or HRT, and pregnancy (when hormone levels also change). Poor diet, poor general health and being overweight also put an extra load on our immune system and so increase the risk of thrush infection.

There are a number of treatment options available. Traditional remedies include the use of natural "live" yoghurt inserted into the vagina or bathing the areas with a little vinegar or lemon juice in water.

Usually more effective are the creams and pessaries containing active antifungal ingredients known as imidazoles. Brand names include Canesten, Monistat, Pevaryl and Resolve. If inflammation is present a mild steroid cream such as Dermaid 1% can give relief. When topical treatments are not successful or when infections recur, the new single-dose oral therapy fluconazole (Diflucan) is generally a convenient and effective alternative; and Diflucan has recently become available without prescription.

For further information, our Pharmacists are available to answer any questions

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