

Bacterial vaginosis

Bacterial vaginosis is a common diagnosis encountered in a gynecological clinic. Vaginosis is the most common cause of increased vaginal discharge and with fungal infection, the most common consequence of disorders of the vaginal microflora. This condition can reduce the quality of life for some women because it is sometimes difficult to treat and causes unpleasant symptoms.

In today's blog, we bring you everything you need to know about bacterial vaginosis - what it is, why it occurs and what symptoms it presents, and everything about diagnosis and treatment. We also answer the question of whether vaginosis is a dangerous condition in pregnancy and finally bring advice on its prevention.



WHAT IS BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a condition characterized by an **imbalance of the normal vaginal flora with excessive growth of anaerobic bacteria in the vagina**. It is the most common inflammation of the vagina in women of reproductive age and the most common cause of increased vaginal discharge. Bacterial vaginosis is not considered a sexually transmitted disease in the true sense of the term because in some cases it

can also occur in women who are not sexually active, but sexual activity can be one of the causative factors in the development of this infection.

Bacterial vaginosis is often an uncomfortable condition for a woman that can impair her quality of life. Contributing to this is the fact that bacterial vaginosis is often a **recurrent infection** , especially if it is caused by chronic stress, improper hygiene habits and irresponsible sexual behavior.

WHY DOES BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS OCCUR?

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The vaginal microbiota (microflora) is a complex community of different microorganisms, and in healthy women it consists of various aerobic and anaerobic bacteria, viruses, fungi and protozoa. Various types of bacteria live in the vagina, which **maintain its pH, participate in numerous physiological processes that take place there and form a barrier to the passage of various pathogens** . Under normal conditions, the vagina is dominated by "good" bacteria called lactobacilli. Lactobacilli are bacteria that possess certain positive properties that maintain a healthy balance of vaginal flora.

When, due to some external factors or health conditions, the number of lactobacilli decreases and the number of other microorganisms in the vagina outgrows, conditions such as fungal infection or bacterial vaginosis occur . A decrease in the number of lactobacilli leads to a decrease in the pH of the vagina, ie a decrease in its acidity. This favors the growth of "bad" microorganisms, especially a bacterium called *Gardernella vaginalis* . It is believed that this bacterium is the main "culprit" for the development of bacterial vaginosis.

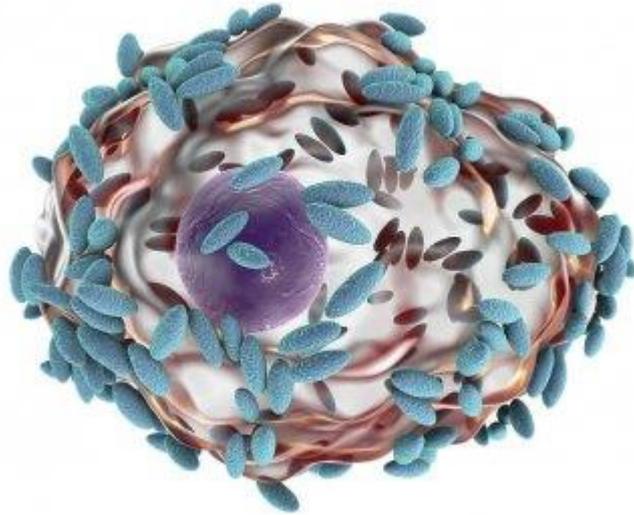
Women who are sexually active, and especially those who have multiple partners or have recently changed partners, are at higher risk of developing bacterial vaginosis. Also, improper hygiene habits such as rinsing the vagina or using inappropriate hygiene products in the intimate area can contribute to disrupting the healthy vaginal microflora.

WHAT IS *GARDERNELLA VAGINALIS* ?

Gardernella vaginalis is an anaerobic bacterium that can normally be found in the colon, uterus and vagina. **With its presence, it does not create problems if it is numerically overcome by lactobacilli, or good bacteria in the vagina.** However, in the conditions of disturbed vaginal microflora that we talked about earlier , *Gardernella* begins to multiply, which consequently leads to the development of bacterial vaginosis.

Gardernella vaginalis is not considered an infectious bacterium in the true sense of the word, but it has been shown that unprotected sexual intercourse can be transmitted from one partner to another and thus disrupt the orderly vaginal microbiota. In addition, this bacterium multiplies to support the growth of other anaerobic bacteria in

the vagina and thus contributes to the progress of the development of bacterial vaginosis.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS?

Bacterial vaginosis in some women does not present with obvious symptoms, but if they do occur, they are most common:

- **copious vaginal discharge of grayish or white-grayish color**
- **unpleasant smell of vaginal discharge per fish**
- **itching of the vagina and external genital area**
- **pain and discomfort during intercourse**

The characteristic odor of vaginal discharge per fish is more pronounced after sexual intercourse and menstruation . Occasionally there may be a burning sensation when urinating. Some of these symptoms may be a sign of a fungal infection or some of the sexually transmitted diseases, so a gynecologist should be contacted to confirm the diagnosis and treat it properly.

HOW IS BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

Bacterial vaginosis can be suspected by a gynecologist already on the basis of a clinical examination and the characteristic appearance and smell of vaginal discharge. The pH of the vagina can also be measured, with a value greater than 4.5 in favor of bacterial vaginosis. Microscopic examination of the vaginal discharge shows characteristic cells, the so-called *clue cells* . By adding a special agent (10% potassium lye solution)

to the sample of vaginal discharge, a characteristic fishy odor appears, which is a positive amine test.

A diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis can be confirmed if there are at least three of the four criteria listed above: **grayish vaginal discharge, vaginal pH higher than 4.5, a positive amine test, and the presence of *clue* cells.**

Treatment of bacterial vaginosis is carried out with metronidazole and / or clindamycin preparations topically in the form of vaginal tablets or creams or systemically in the form of tablets, usually for seven days. Concomitant treatment of the partner is also recommended. During treatment it is necessary to abstain from sexual intercourse or use mechanical contraception (condom). It should be emphasized that women who are prescribed a topical clindamycin cream should not use latex products (condom or diaphragm) because the drug can damage this type of contraception and reduce its effect.

Studies have shown that the use of **vaginal probiotics** during and after therapy helps to restore the vaginal microflora and reduces the risk of recurrence of infection, so often antibiotic therapy is prescribed probiotics (lactobacilli).



IS BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS DANGEROUS IN PREGNANCY?

Although in most cases bacterial vaginosis in pregnancy does not cause complications, its presence can increase the risk of miscarriage, infection of the amniotic sac and premature birth , so in all symptomatic pregnant women its treatment is recommended. The symptoms of vaginosis are the same as in women who are not pregnant. The drugs of choice in pregnancy are clindamycin orally or vaginally in the first trimester and metronidazole in the second and third trimesters.

HOW TO PREVENT BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS?

Since bacterial vaginosis is often a recurrent infection, it is important to remove or change the factors that favor its development. Below we bring you tips for preventing bacterial vaginosis and maintaining intimate health:

- **Be responsible in your sexual behavior** , especially if you are entering into a relationship with a new partner. It is certainly important to use a condom to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, it is important to go regularly for a gynecological examination , Pap test and, if necessary, make cervical swabs for sexually transmitted bacteria.
- **maintain proper intimate hygiene** . It is important to maintain a slightly acidic value of the pH of the vagina because it is the most suitable condition for the development of natural and healthy vaginal flora. You can do this by applying intimate hygiene products whose pH value should be between 3.8 and 4.5. After washing the area with an intimate care product, it is best to rinse it with lukewarm water. If you do not have preparations specifically intended for washing the intimate area, then it is best to do it with plain lukewarm water. Avoid using aggressive and inappropriate shampoos in the area. In addition, avoid washing the intimate area frequently. It is recommended to take a shower up to a maximum of twice a day.
- **use sanitary pads and tampons made of natural materials.** Tampons and pads need to be changed often enough. Avoid daily use of daily pads, except when you need them during scanty menstrual bleeding or during ovulation due to increased discharge.
- **Use cotton and breathable underwear** , and avoid synthetic materials.
- **Take probiotics** - they play a significant role in maintaining a healthy vaginal flora and preventing urinary tract infections . They are available as dietary supplements, but are also available in probiotic yogurts and kefir. They can also be found in the form of vaginal tablets. If you are on antibiotic therapy, it is useful to use probiotics in the form of vaginal tablets or capsules taken by mouth, to prevent the development of a fungal infection or vaginosis.