



Vaginal Discharge

What is Vaginal Discharge?

You may have noticed that at times there is liquid coming from your vagina. You may see it on your underwear or when you wipe yourself. It can feel like water or it can be thick and sticky. It comes from mucous-producing cells in your vagina. This is discharge and this is normal. Vaginal discharge is the body's way of keeping the vagina clean and healthy. Normal discharge is usually clear or white. It can sometimes look yellow when it dries on underwear.

Why does my discharge change?

You may notice that your discharge changes during the month between your periods, becoming heavier or stickier during the middle of your menstrual cycle due to changes in hormones related to ovulation (the release of an egg from your ovary). This is all normal.

When should I tell my healthcare provider about my discharge?

You should always tell your healthcare provider if you have concerns about discharge. You should talk to your provider if the discharge looks or smells different than what is normal for you. Examples may include an increase in the amount of daily discharge, a change in color to more yellow or green, a change in the smell to a stinky or fishy odor. Other concerns can be unusual vulvar itchiness associated with the discharge, burning when you pee, or skin changes of your vulva including unusual lumps or sores or other skin irritation.

How do I know if I have an infection?

Your healthcare provider can help you determine if you have an infection by looking at a sample of the discharge under a microscope or by sending it to a lab for testing. Some common types of vaginal infections include: vaginal yeast infection or bacterial vaginosis. Sexually transmitted infections like Chlamydia, Gonorrhea or Trichomonas can also cause unusual vaginal discharge. You should make sure your provider knows if you are sexually active so that they can check for sexually transmitted infections that might be causing your vaginal discharge.

How do I prevent myself from getting a vaginal infection?

There are some things that can be helpful to prevent vaginal infections including: wearing cotton underwear, avoiding tight-fitting pants for extended periods of time, showering after exercising and getting sweaty, and changing out of a wet bathing suit after swimming. It is also helpful to use a mild soap when washing your vulva and make sure to rinse well. Avoid getting soap in your vagina. Avoid using scented soaps and body washes which may irritate your vulva and vagina and do not use feminine hygiene products like douches, sprays or powder which also may be irritating. Use unscented panty liners, pads and tampons for your periods and avoid wearing these things if you don't have your period. Use condoms regularly when you have sex to avoid sexually transmitted infections.