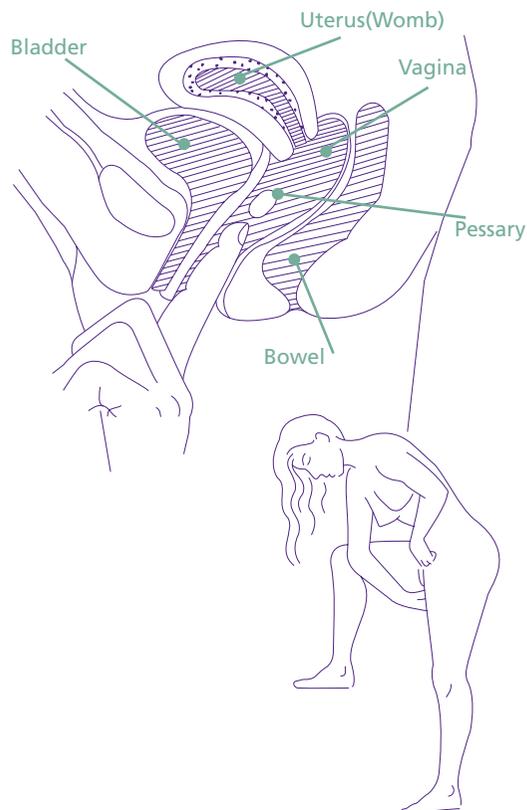


Putting a pessary into the vagina



Bacterial vaginosis

Also known as gardnerella.

Changes in the balance of normal vaginal bacteria can cause bacterial vaginosis.

It is not an STI.

In women there can be

- a greyish-white thin discharge
- an unpleasant smell – this is more noticeable after sexual intercourse and periods.

It is usually treated with tablets by mouth.

These are prescribed by a doctor.

Sexually transmissible infections

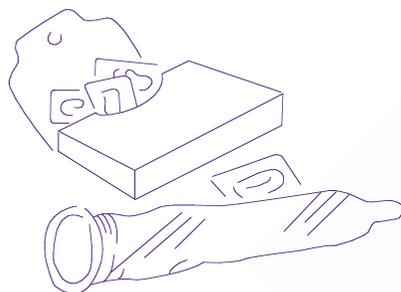
Many STIs such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia have no symptoms. In some women they can cause

- a smelly, yellow or irritating discharge
- unusual bleeding
- abdominal pain
- painful sexual intercourse.

If there is the slightest chance you might have an STI see a health professional for a check up.

You can go to a

- Family Planning centre or clinic
- Sexual Health Centre
- Doctor.



Condoms help protect against sexually transmissible infections.

For more information about Family Planning resources, clinics and health promotion services go to our website, familyplanning.org.nz

Vaginal Discharges

What is normal?

Most women have some vaginal discharge which is clear or white. When it dries on your underwear it looks yellow and has a slight smell.

A vaginal discharge helps to keep your vagina moist and comfortable. It changes throughout your menstrual cycle. During your most fertile time, about 15 or 16 days before your period, there is more discharge. It is slippery and clear.

Many useful bacteria live in your vagina. They keep harmful bacteria under control. They cause a slight smell which is completely normal. Normal vaginal discharge can change from day to day.

It is often heavier

- midway between periods
- when you have an IUD
- during pregnancy
- after sexual intercourse.

There is less discharge

- when breast feeding
- after menopause
- when using the contraceptive injection.

What is not normal?

A vaginal discharge is not normal when it

- itches or irritates
- smells unpleasant
- changes colour.

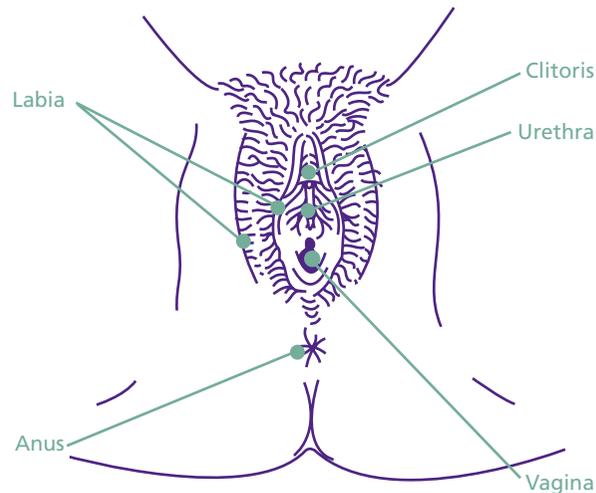
It is also **not normal** to have

- bleeding between periods
- uncomfortable or painful sexual intercourse
- lower abdominal pain.

Any of these can be a sign of infection. If you notice any of them see your health professional. This is very important if you think you could have a sexually transmissible infection (STI).

Your doctor will discuss your concerns, check your genital area and take swab tests. Other tests may be suggested.

Women often ask for a cervical smear test when they are worried about an infection. However, swab tests are needed to find infection.



Suggestions for vaginal health

- wash your genital area daily
- do not douche
- wipe yourself from front to back after a bowel motion
- wear cotton underwear and avoid tight jeans and lycra shorts
- avoid perfumed soaps and coloured toilet paper.

Common vaginal infections

THRUSH

Also called candida, yeast or fungal infection. It is normal to have candida in your vagina and bowel. Sometimes candida grows too much and causes problems.

This may happen if

- you are taking antibiotics
- you are pregnant
- you have diabetes
- you are under stress
- there is not enough lubrication during sexual intercourse
- you have low immunity such as an HIV infection.

Thrush is not an STI.

In women there can be

- an uncomfortable, thick, white discharge
- itching, redness and swelling of the genital area
- painful sexual intercourse.

Thrush is usually treated with cream or pessaries, which you put into your vagina, or tablets by mouth. You can buy these from a pharmacy or get a prescription from a Family Planning Clinic or from a doctor.

To help reduce the irritation, put a handful of salt in your bath water.

Some women find natural remedies helpful.

See a doctor if

- you are not sure you have thrush
- you get thrush more than four times a year.