Trichomonas vaginalis is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI). It is sometimes referred to as trichomonas or trichomoniasis, or shortened to TV. The infection can spread if you have vaginal sex or possibly by sharing sex toys.

This leaflet gives you information about trichomonas, advice on how to protect yourself, and how to get tested and treated if you think you might have the infection.

Trichomonas vaginalis

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What causes trichomonas vaginalis?
Trichomonas vaginalis – sometimes called TV – is an infection caused by a tiny parasite. The infection is easily passed from one person to another through sexual contact. Anyone who is sexually active can get it. Both men and women can have trichomonas and pass it on.

Often there are no symptoms, so you may not know you have the infection.

How is trichomonas passed on?
Trichomonas can be passed from one person to another during sex. In women, the infection can live inside the cells of the vagina and in the urethra (tube where urine comes out). In men, the infection can be found in the urethra.

Trichomonas is almost always passed on sexually. The infection can spread if you have vaginal sex or possibly by sharing sex toys. Using a condom correctly will reduce your chance of getting or passing on trichomonas.

It is possible for a pregnant woman to pass the infection to her baby at birth.

You cannot get trichomonas from kissing, hugging, from sharing cups, plates or cutlery, or from swimming pools or shared baths.

How can I protect myself from trichomonas?
It is possible to get trichomonas by having sex with someone who has the infection but has
no symptoms.
• **Use condom** (male or female) every time you have vaginal sex.
• If you are not sure how to use condoms correctly, call **fpa** (see back cover) for a free leaflet.
• If you’re not happy with the condoms you have tried already, why not try a different brand or type? They come in a variety of shapes and sizes.
• **Avoid sharing sex toys** – if they are shared, wash them or cover them with a new condom before anyone else uses them.
These measures can also help to protect you from some other STIs such as HIV, chlamydia and gonorrhoea. If you have trichomonas without knowing it they will also help prevent you from passing it on.

**What are the signs and symptoms?**

Up to half of infected people will not have any symptoms at all. If you think you could have trichomonas then go for a check-up and encourage your partner to be checked too. Sexual health clinics don't mind doing check-ups.

Symptoms can show up 3-21 days after coming into contact with trichomonas. If you do get symptoms you might notice:

**Women**
• a change in vaginal discharge: this may increase, become thinner, frothy, or change in colour and develop a musty or fishy smell
• soreness, inflammation and itching in and around the vagina
• pain when passing urine
• pain when having sex
• lower abdominal tenderness.

**Men**
• an itchy, burning sensation in the penis when you urinate
• yellow, green or frothy discharge

If you have symptoms, let your GP know about them straight away.
Men
+ a discharge from the penis, which may be thin and whitish
+ pain, or a burning sensation, when passing urine
+ inflammation of the glands and foreskin (this is uncommon).

If I don’t get symptoms how will I know if I have the infection?
You won’t know unless you have a test. If you or your partner think you might have an infection, you should both have a test. Even if you don’t have symptoms you may wish to be tested particularly if:
+ you have had unprotected sex with a new partner recently
+ you or your partner has had unprotected sex with other partners
+ during a vaginal examination your doctor or nurse notices an unusual discharge
+ a sexual partner tells you they have an STI
+ you are found to have another STI.
Don’t delay seeking advice — clinics don’t mind doing sexual health check-ups.

How soon after sex can I have a test?
You should have the test as soon as you think you might have been in contact with trichomonas. For some people trichomonas won’t show up on the test straightaway and they may have to wait up to a week for the result.

You can go to a genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic, a sexual health clinic or to your GP. If your GP doesn’t offer testing, they will refer you to a clinic that does. A leaflet Sexually transmitted infections — where to go for help and advice is
available free from fpa (see back cover).

It is not uncommon to have more than one infection at any one time, so ask about being tested for others. Evidence shows that trichomonas infection can increase HIV transmission. Talk to the doctor or nurse about any concerns you might have.

**What does the test involve?**

A doctor or nurse will use a swab to collect a sample of cells. They may also ask you to give a urine sample. There are many myths about how swabs are done. A swab looks a bit like a cotton bud, but is smaller, soft and rounded. The swab is wiped over the parts of the body that could be infected and easily picks up samples of discharge and cells. It only takes a few seconds and is not usually painful, though it may be uncomfortable for a moment. Swabs may be used to pick up cells from:

- the vagina, during an internal examination in women
- the genital area
- the urethra.

No tests are 100% accurate, but tests for trichomonas should pick up almost all infections in women, and most infections in men. If your test is negative, but your partner is diagnosed with trichomonas, treatment is usually given.

Sometimes trichomonas will be found during a routine cervical smear test. Routine blood tests do not detect infections such as trichomonas. If you are not sure whether you have been tested for trichomonas, just ask.
What is the treatment for trichomonas?
Treatment of trichomonas is simple and involves taking antibiotic tablets. There are several different antibiotics that can be used. These are taken either as a single dose or a longer course (up to a week). If there is a high chance of you having the infection, treatment may be started before the results of the test are back. There are no treatments that you can buy without a prescription and there is no evidence that complementary therapies can cure trichomonas.

Some of the antibiotics that are used to treat trichomonas interact with the combined oral contraceptive pill. If you are taking the pill tell the doctor or nurse and they can advise you what to do. You should also tell the doctor or nurse if you are, or think you might be, pregnant or if you are breastfeeding. This will influence the type of antibiotic that is given to you.

How effective is the treatment?
Treatment is very effective. If you take all the antibiotics according to the instructions it is rare for them not to work. Avoid vaginal sex until you and your partner have both finished treatment, otherwise you could be re-infected. If this is not possible, make sure that you use a condom.

You will be advised not to drink alcohol during the treatment and for 48 hours afterwards. This is because antibiotics used to treat trichomonas react with alcohol and can make you feel very unwell.

Can trichomonas go away without treatment?
For most people trichomonas is very unlikely to go away without treatment.