Thrush and Bacterial vaginosis
Looking after your sexual health
Thrush is an infection that is caused by a yeast fungus. It is not a sexually transmitted infection but can sometimes develop after you have had sex. Thrush can develop in the vagina and on the male and female genitals. It is a very common cause of unusual vaginal discharge – three out of four women will have thrush at some point in their lives. Most men will not get thrush.

Bacterial vaginosis is the most common cause of unusual vaginal discharge which develops when the normal environment of the vagina changes. One in three women will get it at some time. It is not a sexually transmitted infection but can develop after you have had sex. Men do not get bacterial vaginosis.

This booklet gives you information about thrush and bacterial vaginosis, what you can do if you are worried that you might have either or both infections and how to get treatment.
7 Where can I get a test?
7 What is the treatment for thrush?
8 How effective is the treatment?
9 Do I need to have a test to check that the thrush has gone?
9 Some situations seem to make my thrush worse, is there anything I can do?
9 I get thrush regularly, is there anything that can help?
10 What happens if thrush isn’t treated?
10 Will my partner need treatment?
10 If I have thrush, will it affect my chances of getting pregnant?
10 What happens if I get thrush when I’m pregnant?
10 Does thrush cause cervical cancer?
11 **Bacterial vaginosis**
11 What causes bacterial vaginosis?
11 How do you get bacterial vaginosis?
11 What are the signs and symptoms of bacterial vaginosis?
12 How will I know if I have bacterial vaginosis?
12 What does the test involve?
13 How accurate are the tests?
13 Where can I get a test?
13 What is the treatment for bacterial vaginosis?
14 How effective is the treatment?
15 Do I need to have a test to check that the bacterial vaginosis has gone?
15 What happens if bacterial vaginosis isn’t treated?
15 What can be done if bacterial vaginosis keeps coming back?
15 Does my partner need treatment?
15 Will bacterial vaginosis affect my chances of getting pregnant?
16 What happens if I get bacterial vaginosis when I'm pregnant?
16 Does bacterial vaginosis cause cervical cancer?
17 General information
17 How can I protect myself from sexually transmitted infections?
17 When should I have a test for a sexually transmitted infection?
18 Will I have to pay for tests and treatment?
18 Where can I get more information and advice?
19 Using a service
20 Helplines and websites

Thrush

What is thrush?
Thrush is usually caused by the yeast fungus candida albicans. This yeast lives harmlessly on the skin and in the mouth, gut and vagina. Normally it is kept under control. Occasionally, however, conditions change and signs and symptoms can develop. This is commonly known as thrush, thrush infection or candida, and sometimes as monilia. In this booklet we use the term thrush. This booklet tells you about thrush that develops in the vagina and on the male and female genitals.

What causes thrush to develop?
Your chances of developing thrush increase if you:
• are pregnant
• wear tight clothing (such as tight jeans) or synthetic clothing (such as nylon underwear) that prevents ventilation
• are taking certain antibiotics
• are having chemotherapy
• have uncontrolled diabetes, HIV or other illnesses that affect your immune system
• use products that may cause irritation of the vagina, such as vaginal deodorant or too much perfumed bubble bath.

Stress may also be a factor for some people.

What are the signs and symptoms of thrush?
Some people will not have any signs or symptoms at all, and may not be aware they have thrush. If you do get symptoms you might notice:

Women
• Itching, soreness and redness around the vagina, vulva (the lips around the opening to the vagina) or anus (the opening to the rectum).
• Unusual, white discharge from the vagina that may be thick and look like cottage cheese. It sometimes smells yeasty.
• Pain when passing urine.
• Pain when having sex.

Men
• Irritation, burning or itching under the foreskin or on the tip of the penis.
• Redness, or red patches, under the foreskin or on the tip of the penis.
• A thin or thicker discharge, like cottage cheese, under the foreskin which sometimes smells yeasty.
• Difficulty in pulling back the foreskin.

How will I know if I have thrush?
If you think that you may have thrush you can speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Thrush
is not a sexually transmitted infection but it is important that you don’t delay seeking advice if you think you may have been at risk of a sexually transmitted infection.

What does the test involve?

Women
A doctor or nurse may:
- look at the vagina and genital area
- use a swab to collect a sample of cells from the vagina, during an internal examination.

You may be asked to use a swab or tampon yourself to get a sample.

Men
A doctor or nurse may:
- look at the penis and genital area
- use a swab to collect a sample of cells from the genital area including under the foreskin.

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 affected 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.

Samples taken during the examination are looked at under a microscope to check for thrush. Sometimes the result is available immediately. If the sample is sent to a laboratory for testing, the result is usually available within a week.

Sometimes thrush signs will be noticed during a cervical screening test, but you will only need treatment if you have problems with discharge
or itching. Routine blood tests do not detect infections such as thrush.

How accurate are the tests?
Tests for thrush are usually very accurate in women. They are less accurate in men, so diagnosis in men is often made by looking at the penis and genital area.

Where can I get a test?
You can have a test as soon as you have signs and symptoms. There are a number of services you can go to. Choose the service you feel most comfortable with.

A test can be done at:
- a genitourinary medicine (GUM) or sexual health clinic
- your general practice
- some contraception clinics and young people’s services.

For information on how to find a service see Helplines and websites on the back cover.

What is the treatment for thrush?
Treatment is simple for both men and women and is only necessary if you have signs and symptoms of thrush.

You may be given some antifungal cream, pessaries, pills or a combination. The doctor or nurse will advise you how to use the treatment. The cream is applied to the genital area. A pessary is usually an almond-shaped tablet which a woman puts high up into her vagina.

You can also buy some antifungal treatments from a pharmacy – these are useful if you are sure you have thrush and want to treat yourself. The
pharmacist will be able to advise if you have any questions, or are unsure how to use the treatment.

• It is very important to take the treatment as instructed and finish any course of treatment even if the symptoms go away earlier.

• Some antifungal products can weaken latex condoms, diaphragms and caps. Polyurethane types can be safely used. Ask the doctor, nurse or pharmacist for advice.

• Do tell the doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you are pregnant, or think you might be, or you are breastfeeding. This will affect the type of treatment that you are given.

• Some women find that complementary therapies, such as bathing the genital area with diluted tea tree oil gel or live plain yoghurt, may help relieve the symptoms of vaginal thrush.

How effective is the treatment?

• Antifungal cream, pessaries or pills are usually effective if you use them according to instructions. Symptoms should disappear within a few days.

• If the first treatment doesn’t work, the doctor or nurse may suggest another test or a combination of treatments.

Do I need to have a test to check that the thrush has gone?

No, this is not usually necessary. However, you may wish to go back to the doctor or nurse if:

• you did not use the treatment as instructed
• the signs and symptoms did not go away
• you think you may have thrush again.
Some situations seem to make my thrush worse, is there anything I can do?
Some women find different triggers cause vaginal thrush. If you notice a pattern, you may be able to help control it. For example:
- Avoid wearing tight, restrictive or synthetic clothing, such as tights, nylon underwear, leggings, lycra shorts, and tight jeans or trousers.
- Make sure the vagina is well lubricated before sexual intercourse.
- Women should wash and wipe the genital area from front to back.

Men and women should also try and avoid perfumed soap, bubble bath, genital sprays and deodorants, and any other irritants such as disinfectants and antiseptics.

If you are prescribed an antibiotic for another condition, remind your doctor that you tend to get thrush and ask for some treatment for thrush at the same time.

I get thrush regularly, is there anything that can help?
Some people may only get one episode of thrush – others may get repeat episodes. If you have four or more episodes of thrush in a year, this is known as recurrent thrush. If this happens, it is important to get medical advice and not to treat yourself. If you get recurrent thrush the doctor or nurse:
- will want to check that other conditions, such as diabetes, are not the cause of the thrush
- may suggest that you take antifungal treatment on a regular basis
- may check that the thrush is not being caused