
TRICHOMONAS VAGINITIS

CAUSE

Trichomonas Vaginitis (or "Trich" as it is commonly called) is caused by a one-celled protozoa (animal) called trichomonas vaginalis. These trichomonads exist in small numbers in the vaginas of some women without causing any problem. An infection results when the trichomonads are present in sufficient numbers to cause irritation. Other trichomonads live in the mouth and intestines without causing disease.

Trichomonas is usually transmitted by sexual contact. The trichomonads can survive under the foreskin of a man's penis or in the urethra or prostate, usually without causing any symptoms and are passed during intercourse. The trichomonads do not survive easily in the male sexual organs and often die after a short time, even without treatment. However, the male lover(s) of a woman who has trich is frequently treated to insure that she does not become reinfected. Trichomonas can also be transferred during sexual intimacy between two women if infected vaginal secretions from one woman contact her partner's vulva. The incubation period for trichomonas is about 4 to 28 days after contact.

Non-sexual transmission is possible. Trichomonads survive best in warm, moist environments, so the possibility of infection being transmitted in whirlpools or from moist objects such as towels or washcloths does exist.

SYMPTOMS

In a woman the most common symptom is abundant discharge. It can be white, yellowish or greenish and is often frothy. It can be foul smelling. Sometimes the discharge causes irritation of the vulva which can become sore and itchy. Contact of urine with the irritated vulva can cause burning during urination. The urethra may also become infected, making urination uncomfortable.

DIAGNOSIS

A gynecological examination should be done and vaginal secretions taken for tests. Under a microscope, the trichomonads can be seen moving in the secretions and this can confirm the diagnosis. If no microscope is available the secretions should be sent to a lab to be cultured. Trichomonads are sometimes seen on Pap tests for cervical cancer and can make the Pap difficult to interpret. After the trichomonas infection has been treated, have another culture done to make sure the treatment has worked. Then repeat the Pap.

CONVENTIONAL TREATMENT

The most common drug used to treat trichomonas is the antibiotic metronidazole (Flagyl). Flagyl can be taken as a one day treatment in either a single dose of 2 grams or in divided doses of 1 gram each, taken twice the same day. Sometimes a dose of 1 gram each day for 3 days is prescribed. Alternatively it can be taken in smaller doses of 250 mg 3 times a day for 7 days. It can cause nausea and vomiting, particularly if alcohol is taken. Other possible side effects are diarrhea, constipation, cramps, dizziness, a metallic taste in your mouth, itching, and a dry mouth and vagina.

Flagyl should definitely not be taken under certain situations: if you have a history of blood disease, are undergoing anticoagulant therapy, have other infections in your body, have disease of the central nervous system, have peptic ulcers or if you are pregnant. Flagyl is a strong drug that can affect the whole body and there are numerous studies indicating its use is dangerous. Flagyl kills some white blood cells which help fight infections. Also in laboratory tests, Flagyl has caused gene mutations in bacteria, birth defects in animals, and cancer in rats and mice.

Flagyl should not be taken by women who are in the first trimester of pregnancy because its effect on the fetus is not known. It is known that it crosses the placental barrier and enters fetal circulation rapidly. Flagyl is also passed in breast milk and so should not be used during breastfeeding.

Because Flagyl kills some white blood cells, a person should wait about six weeks before taking it again so that the body has time to replace the white blood cells. A white blood cell count should be done before, during, and soon after taking Flagyl the second time.

ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

The following are alternative treatments that some women have found useful in treating trichomonas. They do not all work for every woman. You may have to experiment to find something that works for you. As well, it is important to remember that your general state of health influences your susceptibility to infection and your ability to recover from it. Changes in your diet may be necessary, such as decreasing the amount of refined carbohydrates and sugar that you eat, and eliminating coffee. It is also important to look at the stress and anxiety level in your life and how you can lower it. You may also want to consider giving your vagina a rest by avoiding vaginal sex during treatment. For further information on how these factors can contribute to vaginal infections, see the paper entitled "Understanding Vaginal Health".

1. Betadine (Povidone-Iodine) Douche and Vagisec Suppositories: Betadine is an antibacterial agent available at drugstores. Douche every morning with 1 tsp. betadine in a pint of water. Insert one Vagisec suppository each night at bedtime or after intercourse. Use the douche throughout one entire menstrual cycle. Do not use this douche if you are allergic to iodine. Also, betadine stains a bright brown.

2. Goldenseal/Myrrh Douche: Douche 2 times daily for 1-2 weeks with:

1 tbsp. myrrh	Boil in 1 pint water, add the herbs and let steep
1 tbsp. goldenseal	for 20 minutes. When cool enough, strain mixture
1 tsp. bayberry bark	and douche.

3. Chickweed Douche: Boil 1 quart of water, remove from heat, add 3 tbsp. chickweed. Cover, let sit 5-10 minutes, strain and douche daily for a week.

A technique to aid in the application of vaginal remedies has been named sucking air. This may be useful if regular douching is not effective for you. Lie on your back in the bath tub at a 45° angle, with your knees bent as close to your head as possible. This allows the vagina to balloon out so that there are no creases or crevices. Relax all of the muscles in your lower body, and then apply a douche that has been warmed to body temperature. The solution can remain in the vagina for several minutes, or until the position becomes too uncomfortable. This position allows the liquid to reach every nook and cranny of the vagina.

4. Garlic Suppositories: Garlic contains sulphur and has proven effective for some women in treating trichomonas. To prepare the suppository, peel the clove taking care not to nick the edge, since the juice can cause a burning sensation. Place the clove in a piece of gauze about one foot long and three-fourths inch wide. Fold the gauze in half and twist it below the clove to make a tampon with a gauze tail. Then dip the garlic end in vegetable oil and insert, changing every 12 hours for 3 to 5 days.

5. Ointments: Goldenseal and comfrey are both available as ointments. So is thuja, a fungicide which is supposed to kill Trichomonas. Apply these liberally on a tampon or just with your fingers inside the vagina and around the vulval lips.

PREVENTION

Regular male sexual partners should be treated to prevent reinfection of the woman. Or a couple can use condoms for 6 weeks, as most male infections resolve without treatment. It has been suggested that uncircumcised men could wash under the foreskin with a Betadine solution ($\frac{1}{2}$ Betadine, $\frac{1}{2}$ water). Vaginal penetration (unless a man is using a condom) or close contact of vaginal secretions should be avoided during treatment. Avoidance of contact with vaginal secretions provides some protection from transmission between women. Infected women should stay out of public baths.

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