

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title:

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Plain Language Summary:

What is Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)?

BV is an infection of the vagina caused by bacteria. Usually, there are more “good” bacteria than “bad” bacteria in the vagina. When this balance is upset, it results in BV.

What does BV feel like?

Symptoms associated with BV include:

- white or gray vaginal discharge
- a foul “fishy” odor especially after intercourse
- itching of the outside of the vagina
- burning during urination
- pain during intercourse.

However, most often women with BV have no signs or symptoms.

How do women get BV?

The cause of BV is not fully known. But, some actions can make BV more likely to happen:

- sex with multiple partners
- douching

Is BV something to worry about?

In most cases, BV does not lead to complications. However, there are some serious risks:

- Pregnant women with BV are more likely to have preterm birth and low birth weight babies.
- Sexually active women with BV are at increased risk for sexually transmitted infections. If you have HIV, BV increases the chance that you will pass it to your partner.
- In women who recently had pelvic surgery, BV increases the chance of developing a post-surgical infection.
- Bacteria that lead to BV may also infect other parts of the female reproductive system, an infection called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

How is BV diagnosed?

Your doctor will perform a pelvic exam. A sample of your vaginal discharge will be taken to look for bacteria that are associated with BV.

How is BV treated?

All women with BV should be treated to prevent complications. BV is treated with antibiotics. These medicines come either as pills you swallow or a cream or capsule you put in your vagina. The medicines are safe for use in pregnant women.

Even after treatment BV can come back. Treatment for recurrent BV is still being studied. One option is longer-use of antibiotics. Another is to increase the “good” bacteria in the vagina, by eating foods that contain it, such as special types of yogurt.

Additional Resources:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/bv/stdfact-bacterial-vaginosis.htm>

Women’s Health.gov

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/bacterial-vaginosis.cfm>

Key Words:

Bacterial Vaginosis

Vaginal discharge

Vaginal odor

Pelvic exam

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