

# **WOMEN'S HEALTH**

## **When It's Your Health, Don't Assume**

(NAPS)—Learning the difference between common feminine conditions and their related symptoms—and seeing a health care provider before taking matters into their own hands—could help many women avoid serious health complications later on.

Women often associate vaginal itching, increased discharge and feminine odor with yeast infections and try to treat symptoms with over-the-counter medications. However, there are several types of vaginal infections—the most common of which is bacterial vaginosis (BV).

A change in the balance of natural microorganisms in the vagina can cause a vaginal infection. BV is caused by an overgrowth of bacteria. This may be associated with the use of scented feminine hygiene products, strong soaps or douches. While a small amount of discharge with no distinct odor is normal, symptoms of BV typically include a foul or “fishy” odor; an increased amount of thin gray or white discharge; and possibly, but not necessarily, itching or burning. However, up to 50 percent of women with BV have no symptoms.

Yeast infections are caused by an overgrowth of yeast called *Candida*, and are associated with antibiotic use, pregnancy and diabetes. Symptoms of a yeast infection include thick, white, cottage cheese-like discharge; no distinct odor; and itching or burning.

“Unlike yeast infections, BV can only be treated with prescribed antibiotics,” says Cynthia Selleck, ARNP, DSN, associate professor at the University of South Florida School of Medicine and a member of the 3M National Vaginitis Association. “Vaginal infections can have similar symptoms and they are often confusing. Don't rely on your self-diagnosis



**Knowing the exact cause of an infection, and discussing the matter with your doctor, can help reduce the risk of problems.**

and avoid a telephone diagnosis. See your health care provider for an accurate assessment.”

The most important difference between BV and yeast infections may be the potential for health risks associated with BV. Bacterial vaginosis is associated with pelvic inflammatory disease—which can lead to infertility—cervicitis and endometritis. Recent studies show BV is associated with an increased risk for acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. In pregnant women, BV can lead to preterm birth, low infant birth weight, post-cesarean infection and an increased risk of miscarriage in the first trimester. Yeast infections are not generally associated with any of these serious health conditions.

Women who think they have an infection should see their health care provider. Self-diagnosing and self-medicating an infection can prolong symptoms and increase the potential for serious health risks. You can learn more online at [www.vaginalinfections.com](http://www.vaginalinfections.com) or call 1-800-4BV-NEWS for a free educational brochure.