

# Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

**B**acterial Vaginosis (BV) is widely considered to be the most common type of vaginal infection. It is a mixture of bacteria, which are normal in the rectum, that are growing in the vagina. It often has a “fishy odor” associated with it. The odor may increase with bathing, menses, and after sexual intercourse, but it is NOT considered a sexually transmitted disease. Recurrence is common.

## WHAT CAUSES BV?

BV is caused by an alteration in the normal flora of the vagina. There are many contributing pathogens and factors, including the routine use of douches, antibiotic use, menses (changes in normal flora), pregnancy and fecal contamination of the vagina due to anal sex. It seems to occur more frequently in women who have new sexual partners or more than one partner, or those who have had multiple partners in the past; however, BV is also found in women who are not sexually active.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BV?

It is possible for women to be unaware of the symptoms of BV. The most common complaint is a foul or “fishy” vaginal odor. This odor often becomes stronger after sexual intercourse or menses. You may also experience a thin, milky white or gray discharge. Vaginal itching may be present and some irritation may occur.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT BV?

Call Health & Wellness for an evaluation. The diagnosis is made by history, physical examination and a few simple tests of your vaginal secretions. Try the prevention tips to decrease the recurrence of BV. You may be given a prescription for antibiotic pills or vaginal creams. Do not use tampons with vaginal creams because they will absorb the medication. Metronidazole (Flagyl) oral tablets or vaginal gel may be prescribed. The medication side effects can include a sharp, unpleasant metallic taste in the mouth, a dull headache, and alcohol intolerance. Avoid alcohol during the entire week you are taking the medication and 24 hours after your last dose because alcohol is likely to cause vomiting. Clindamycin is an oil-based

medicated vaginal cream also used to treat BV. It can weaken latex condoms for at least 72 hours after stopping therapy.

## PREVENTION:

- Wear cotton panties
- Do not wear tight, restrictive clothes such as tight jeans
- Clean sex toys with soap and water
- Leave your underwear off while you are sleeping
- Limit tub bathing and use of hot tubs or whirlpools
- Avoid the use of bubble baths, feminine deodorant sprays, and perfumed sanitary products and douching
- Use good hygiene: wipe from front to back, especially after bowel movements. Change your tampons and pads often during your period
- Avoid having anal sex followed by vaginal sex
- Using condoms for one month after treatment has shown a decrease in recurrence rates

## WHEN SHOULD I COME BACK TO HEALTH & WELLNESS?

If symptoms increase or fail to improve.  
If you have repeated infections.

## CONTACT HEALTH & WELLNESS IF YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS.



**Health & Wellness**

603-862-9355 • [unh.edu/health](http://unh.edu/health) • @UNHHealth



ACCREDITATION ASSOCIATION  
for AMBULATORY HEALTH CARE, INC.