Bacterial Vaginosis

What is Bacterial Vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a common condition of the vagina caused by an overgrowth of various types of bacteria. The vagina naturally has an environment containing 'good' and 'bad' bacteria. In BV, the balance is upset, with an increase in harmful bacteria and a decrease in good bacteria.

Symptoms

Symptoms of bacterial vaginosis can vary, and around half of the women with BV do not display symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they may include:

1. Thin, grey, white or green vaginal discharge.
2. Fishy odour, particularly strong after sex.
3. Burning sensation during urination.
4. Itching around the outside of the vagina.

Causes

The exact cause of BV is not known, but certain factors can increase your risk, including:

1. Having multiple sex partners or a new sex partner.
2. Douching which disrupts the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina.
3. Lack of natural vaginal lactobacilli bacteria.

It's important to note that BV isn't considered a sexually transmitted infection (STI), but having BV can increase your risk of getting an STI.

Diagnosis

Your GP may diagnose BV based on your history and symptoms. They may also perform tests including:

1. A vaginal pH test.
2. Taking a sample of vaginal secretions for microscopic examination.

Treatment

BV is typically treated with prescribed antibiotics, such as metronidazole or clindamycin. It's important to complete the full course of antibiotics, even if symptoms clear up, to ensure that the infection is fully resolved.

Potential Complications

If untreated, BV can lead to increased risk of:

1. Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), an infection of the uterus, fallopian tubes and/or ovaries.
2. Pregnancy complications such as preterm birth or low birth weight.
3. Increased susceptibility to STIs, including HIV.

Prevention

While it's not fully understood how to prevent BV, the following steps can reduce your risk:

1. Avoid douching.
2. Use of condoms and dental dams during sexual activity.
3. Limiting the number of sexual partners.

When to See Your Doctor

You should consult your GP if:

1. You have never had bacterial vaginosis before.
2. You have had it but symptoms are different this time.
3. You have tried self-treatment but symptoms have not gone away.
4. Symptoms recur after treatment.

Please do not hesitate to contact your healthcare provider if you have any further questions or concerns.

This information is intended for general informational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. If you have any health concerns, please see your healthcare provider.

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