

Recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis (Thrush)

 **Information for patients**
Gynaecology



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What is vulvovaginal candidiasis?

Vulvovaginal candidiasis (VVC) is a common skin condition (often known as thrush) affecting the vagina and the vulva (outer folds of skin the vagina).

What is recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis?

If you have 4 or more episodes of VVC in a year; this is classed as recurrent VVC.

Is this a common condition?

Yes. Up to 75% of women will experience VVC at some point in their lives.

What causes vulvovaginal candidiasis?

VVC is caused by yeast cells. It is normal for these yeast cells to live inside your vagina, as well as in your gut and mouth. Usually they are in balance with the other good bacteria that normally live in these areas. Sometimes the yeast cells can over grow. We do not know exactly why this causes the symptoms of VVC.

Possible triggers that may increase the risk of developing VVC are:

- Antibiotics (which kill other bacteria which normally keep the yeast cells in the vagina in balance). These may need to be stopped.
- Pregnancy (a pregnancy test may be required)
- Some oral contraceptives. These may need to be changed.
- Diabetes that is poorly controlled
- Certain sexual practices (particularly women receiving oral sex)

What are the symptoms of vulvovaginal candidiasis?

You may experience the following in the affected areas:

Common symptoms:

- Itching (commonest symptom), this can sometimes be very severe resulting in some patients needing to scratch themselves; which in turn can cause further damage to your skin (excoriations).
- Vaginal discharge, the discharge is often white and may be lumpy, however the discharge may also be clear. It is usually odourless (has no smell).

Other symptoms:

- A burning sensation or pain on passing urine
- Pain or discomfort whilst having sexual intercourse
- Swelling and redness around the vulva

All of these symptoms can also occur in other conditions which also affect the vulval area. Therefore, it is always important to see a doctor for further assessment.

The following may help with some of the symptoms:

- Avoid scented soap/shower gels
- Wear well ventilated clothing and cotton underwear
- Eat a probiotic yoghurt daily
- Garlic capsules (taken by mouth)
- Use tea tree oil in the bath
- Avoid a diet high in refined sugars (such as white bread, pasta) and binges of sugary confectionary

Can there be any complications vulvovaginal candidiasis?

Yes. The itch and discomfort may cause you distress. Changes to the skin around the vulva may cause difficulties when having sexual intercourse or problems in passing urine.

However, there are no long-term complications with VVC.

How is vulvovaginal candidiasis diagnosed?

Women who have any of the above symptoms will be referred to a gynaecologist. Investigations may include:

Examination: The doctor will carefully examine the affected area and discuss the history of the skin condition.

Swabbing: A swab is taken from inside the vagina or from the area of the vulva affected and sent to the laboratory to test for the presence of any yeast cells.

Blood Test: This may be taken to check for diabetes.

Can recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis be cured?

Good research shows that around 58% of patients will have another episode (relapse) within 12 months of finishing their maintenance treatment.

The reason for the relapse is thought to be caused by:

- Yeasts from the gut travelling into the vagina
- Resistant yeasts in the vagina growing back
- Re-infection from sexual contact (however there is good evidence that there is no benefit in treating sexual partners)

How is recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis treated?

Medication: Oral or vaginal medication with creams applied to the vulva. The aim of the treatment is to treat the current infection and prevent a further infection. It is important that you maintain treatment for 6 months.

Treatment is well worthwhile as 90% of patients treated will not have another episode in 3 months and 70% of patients treated will not have another episode within 6 months.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you need any further information then please do not hesitate to contact:

- Vulval Clinic Secretary: **0114 226 8300**



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