

## **Vaginitis**

**Marianne Marchese, N.D.**

Vaginitis is inflammation of the vagina often causing itching, burning, irritation discharge and discomfort. It is one of the most common reasons a woman seeks medical care. Vaginitis falls into three forms, allergic, atrophic and infective. All three can cause a woman great discomfort.

Allergic vaginitis can be due to reactions to spermicides, condoms, soaps, douches, perfumes, medications and hot tubs. Other irritants can include abrasions, tampons, and sanitary napkins. A careful history must be obtained to establish an etiology and a period of avoiding the possible irritant to evaluate if symptoms subside.

Atrophic vaginitis is usually due to low levels of circulating estrogens in the body. This causes the lining of the vaginal canal to thin and become atrophic. A thin vaginal lining may predispose a woman to secondary infections. Typically, a woman will complain of discharge, dryness, itching or burning. Prescription vaginal estrogen is often necessary to maintain the vaginal lining, flora and proper pH.

The three most common infections of the vagina are bacterial, candida, and trichomonas. Bacterial vaginitis is an infection of the vagina by an overgrowth of bacteria, most commonly Gardnerella. Other bacteria include; group B strep, E.coli, mycoplasma and ureaplasma. Each bacterium is managed with a different treatment approach. Candida vaginitis is one of the most common infections of the female genital tract. There are several strains of candida and it is important to test to determine which strain is present in order to find the most effective treatment.

Trichomoniasis vaginitis is one of the most common protozoan infections in the U.S. The primary means of transmission is sexual contact. Both men and women can be asymptomatic providing a means of transmission and reinfection. This must be treated with an antibiotic.

### Treatment

Treatment of irritant vaginitis involves first identifying the offending agent and then complete avoidance. Consider semen, food, clothing, detergent and soap allergens. Discontinue the use of hot tubs and douches. Evaluate topical medications and natural creams as possible irritants.

Hormonal vaginitis can be treated by replenishing the vaginal tissue with intravaginal estrogen. This will increase lubrication, elasticity, and thickness of the vaginal epithelium as well as restore the vaginal flora. Estriol can be compounded in to a cream or suppositories.

Bacterial, candida, and trichomonas vaginitis treatment centers on looking at the problem holistically instead of giving medications that just kill the organism. Prevention is the first step. Tight clothing and panty hose predispose a woman to yeast infections. Safe sex practices using barrier protection may be helpful in preventing recurrent vaginal infections. Adequate nutrition is important for maintaining a healthy immune system. Avoid sugar, refined carbohydrates, and alcohol. Increase the intake of yogurt with live acidophilus cultures to help maintain the ecosystem of the vagina.

Herbal suppositories for the treatment of bacterial vaginitis might include herbs such as echinacea, hydrastis, althea, usnea, geranium and althea. These are anti-microbial and can kill off the overgrowth of bacteria. Suppositories for yeast vaginitis might include boric acid, calendula, and oregon grape root. Vaginal probiotic suppositories can be supplemented in all conditions to normalize the vaginal flora.