

Vaginitis and Urinary Tract Infections

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Vaginitis

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 is a prescription medication. 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.

For infective vaginitis, 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 probiotics specific to the vaginal flora. Herbal suppositories for the treatment of bacterial and yeast vaginitis are safe and effective. Vaginal probiotic suppositories can be supplemented in all conditions to normalize the vaginal flora.

Urinary Tract Infections- Cystitis

Acute cystitis and recurrent cystitis are two important categories of urinary tract infections in adults. Sexual intercourse, diaphragm use and a spermicide, possibly spermicide used alone, delayed post-coital urination, and a history of a recent urinary tract infection, all increase the risk of infection.

Women who present with painful urination usually have either acute cystitis; acute urethritis due to *Chlamydia trachomatis*, *Neisseria gonorrhoea*, or herpes simplex virus; or vaginitis due to candida or trichomonas. These problems can usually be differentiated on the basis of presenting symptoms, physical exam and urinalysis. A urine culture, vaginal culture and *Chlamydia* testing may be needed to differentiate the location and type of infection.

Postmenopausal women may also have frequent infections due the lack of estrogen causing changes in the vaginal microflora. These women often benefit from the use of prescription vaginal estrogen cream.

For most bladder infections, a naturopathic approach is usually very effective and the infection resolves quickly and without recurrence or complications. The primary goals are to:

1. Enhance internal defenses against the infection by providing immune support.
2. Restore vaginal microflora
3. Promote a proper pH
4. Prevent bacteria from adhering to the bladder epithelium.

Increasing the urinary flow is important and easily accomplished by increasing the quantity of liquids. Water and herbal teas related to the treatment goals are the most logical choices. 64 ounces is the common recommendation. There are numerous herbal medicines specific to the urinary tract that can treat UTIs if the patient seeks treat early. Sometimes an antibiotic is required if the infection is severe.

Naturopathic treatments for urinary tract infections in women are very safe and effective once other causes of UTI symptoms are ruled out. If treated early and appropriately a urinary tract infection resolves quickly and without complications.