

Your Guide to

Thrush

Simple facts on identifying symptoms, treatment, and prevention.



What is it?

Candidiasis, often called thrush, is caused by an overgrowth of a yeast called *Candida*. The most common type is *Candida albicans*, but other types of *Candida* can also cause symptoms.

Small amounts of *Candida* often live on and inside the body, without causing any problems. Thrush happens when this natural balance changes and the yeast grows too much.

Thrush is very common and is not a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

How do you get it?

Thrush can happen for no obvious reason. It is caused by changes in the natural balance of yeast and bacteria in the body.

Things that can make thrush **more likely** include:

- Taking certain antibiotics
- Using the combined oral contraceptive pill
- Hormonal changes: pregnancy, menopause, having a period
- Diabetes
- Sweaty or moist skin, for example after exercise
- Friction, including after sex
- Being run down or immunosuppressed
- Using perfumed soaps, body washes, or vaginal products
- Skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis
- Having a foreskin, in people with a penis.

Although thrush is not usually an STI, yeast can sometimes be passed between partners during sex and may cause symptoms.

Symptoms

Thrush often causes itching and irritation in the genital area.

For people with a vagina, symptoms **may** include:

- Itching, burning, or irritation
- Thick white vaginal discharge, often described as “cottage cheese-like”
- Redness or swelling of the vulva
- Burning or pain during sex
- Small cracks in the skin.

For people with a penis, symptoms **may** include:

- Redness and itching on the head of the penis
- Soreness or irritation, sometimes worse after sex
- Itching in the groin
- Swelling or cracks in the skin in more severe cases.

How do you get tested?

If you have symptoms, thrush can usually be diagnosed with a swab arranged by a doctor or nurse.

If you do not have symptoms, testing and treatment are not usually needed.

Partners do not need testing for thrush.

Treatment

Thrush is treated with antifungal medication. This may include:

- Creams or vaginal pessaries
- Oral antifungal tablets.

Recurrent thrush

Thrush is considered recurrent if you have four or more episodes in 12 months.

If this happens, see your nurse, doctor, or sexual health clinic. They may:

- Check for other possible causes or infections
- Suggest longer-term antifungal treatment to help prevent it coming back.

Prevention

To help reduce the chance of thrush:

- Avoid douching or using scented soaps, wipes, commercial feminine washes, or antiseptics in the genital area
- Wear breathable cotton underwear
- Change out of damp clothing promptly
- Avoid irritants that seem to trigger symptoms
- Consider using condoms if symptoms seem to flare with sex.

Telling your partners

Thrush is not usually sexually transmitted, so partners do not normally need treatment. However, if a partner has symptoms, they should be checked and treated if needed.

Where can I get help?

Attend your local sexual health clinic or primary care provider.

For more information on all things sexual health and STIs, visit the Just the Facts website: justthefacts.co.nz.





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