General Instructions for Vaginal Infections

Vaginitis is a term to describe many common vaginal infections. These infections may be due to an imbalance of normal germs (*bacteria*) that exist in the vagina. Many others are caused by sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). If any medication was prescribed to treat your specific infection, it is very important that you take the medication as directed. Your caregiver may want to examine and treat your sex partner.

CAUSES

The vagina normally contains organisms (bacteria and yeast) in a balance. Certain factors can disturb this balance and cause an infection, such as:

- Sexual intercourse.
- Nursing.
- Pregnancy.
- Menopause.
- Hormone changes in the body.
- Antibiotics.
- Infection elsewhere in your body.
- Birth control pills or patches.
- Douches.
- Spermicides.
- Medical illnesses (diabetes).

SYMPTOMS

Different types of vaginal infections cause symptoms such as:

- Itching.
- Pain or burning.
- Bad odor.
- Pain or bleeding with sexual intercourse.
- Redness of the vulva.
- Abnormal discharge (yellow, green, heavy white and thick).
- Fever.
- A sore on the vulva or vagina.
- Urinary symptoms (painful or bloody urine).
- Pelvic and/or abdominal pain.
- Rectal bleeding, discharge or pain.

DIAGNOSIS

- Your caregiver will base the diagnosis upon the symptoms that you report.
- A complete history of your sex life may be taken
- You may have a pelvic exam.
- A sample of your vaginal fluid and/or discharge will be examined under the microscope.
- Cultures will help complete the exact diagnosis.

TREATMENT

Treatment depends on the cause of your vaginitis. Your treatment may include a medicine that kills germs (*antibiotic*). The antibiotic may be a shot, a pill, and/or vaginal suppository or cream. It is not uncommon for more than one type of infection to be present. If more than one infection is present, two or more medications may be required. Reoccurrence of vaginal infections may be treated with vaginal suppositories or vaginal cream 2 times a week, or as directed.

If your caregiver finds that an STD exists, treatment of your sexual partner(s) is important. This is especially important for those infected with chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, bacterial vaginosis, syphilis and HIV infections. Treating sexual partners will prevent you from being re-infected and help stop the spread of STD infection to others. Although it is best to see a specialist for STD/HIV testing and counseling, this is not always possible. Some states/provinces permit something called **“expedited partner therapy.”** This kind of program permits you to deliver prescription(s) to a partner without the partner having to seek a formal medical exam.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take all prescribed medication.
- If applicable, speak to your partner about recommended treatment.
- **Do not** have sexual intercourse for one week, or as directed by your caregiver.
- Practice safe sex.
  - Use condoms.
  - Have only one sex partner.
  - Make sure your sex partner does not have any other sex partners.
- Avoid tight pants and panty hose.
- Wear cotton underwear.
- **Do not** douche.
- Avoid tampons, especially scented ones.
- Take warm sitz baths.
- Avoid vaginal sprays and perfumed soaps or bath oils.
- Apply medicated cream (steroid cream) for itching or irritation with the permission of your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have any kind of abnormal vaginal discharge.
- Your sex partner has a genital infection.
- You have pain or bleeding with sexual intercourse.
- You have itching, pain, irritation or bleeding of the vulva.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a fever.
- You have abdominal (belly) pain.
- Symptoms do not improve within 3 days.
- You develop painful or bloody urine.
- You develop rectal pain, bleeding or discharge.

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