

## ***Bacterial Vaginosis***

### ***What is it?***

It is a change in the normal bacteria of the vagina. The exact cause of BV is unknown. There are many bacteria that live in a normal vagina. When you have BV, there are not enough “good” bacteria. This causes harmful bacteria to grow in the vagina, causing the vaginal environment to be out of balance. It is known that BV is associated with having a new sex partner or having multiple sex partners.

### ***What are the symptoms?***

Most women with BV have no symptoms at all. Sometimes a woman has more vaginal discharge than usual. The discharge might be milky with a “fishy” odor. The odor can be worse after sex. Other symptoms women may experience include itching or burning in or near the vagina.

### ***How serious is it?***

BV is usually not serious. In some cases, however, it can cause infections in the uterus and fallopian tubes. It is important to treat BV, especially before having an IUD inserted, or tests done on the uterine lining. BV during pregnancy may cause the baby to be born too soon.

### ***How is it diagnosed?***

The health care provider will do a few simple tests in the clinic. Looking at the vaginal discharge under the microscope for bacteria and checking the acid level of the vagina are two tests that help the health care provider decide if a woman has BV.

### ***How is it treated?***

The health care provider can prescribe an antibiotic, taken by mouth, called metronidazole or Flagyl®. There is also a vaginal cream. This medicine can cause nausea or a metal aftertaste in the mouth for some people. Take it with food. **DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL ANY TIME WHILE TAKING THIS MEDICINE.** This medicine can cause severe nausea and vomiting when combined with alcohol. Either use a condom or do not have sex until you have finished taking the antibiotic. The health care provider can order antibiotic vaginal creams or gels which work just as well, but the cost is higher. The side effects are less with vaginal antibiotics.

### *How can I reduce my chances of getting it?*

The following basic prevention steps can help reduce the risk of upsetting the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina and developing BV:

- Be abstinent.
- Limit the number of sex partners.
- Do not douche.
- Use all of the medicine prescribed for treatment of BV, even if the signs and symptoms go away.

**For more information about STDs, talk to your health care provider or call:**

**The State of Tennessee HIV/STD Hotline: 1-800-525-2437**

**(Monday through Friday 8:00 to 4:30 p.m. CST)**

**OR**

**The CDC National STD Hotline: 1-800-227-8922**

#### **Other Informational Links:**

**American Social Health Association**

<http://www.ashastd.org/>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

<http://www.cdc.gov/STD/>

**E-Cards, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

<http://www2c.cdc.gov/ecards/index.asp?category=174>

**Get Yourself Tested**

<http://www.gytnow.org/>

**National Institute of Health Medline**

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html>

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/sexually-transmitted-infections.cfm>

**World Health Organization**

[http://www.who.int/topics/sexually\\_transmitted\\_infections/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/sexually_transmitted_infections/en/)