



Health professionals
committed to the
reproductive needs of
children and adolescents

Vaginal Discharge

What is Vaginal Discharge?

You may have noticed that at times there is liquid coming from your vagina. You may see it on your underwear or when you wipe yourself. It can feel like water or it can be thick and sticky. It comes from mucous-producing cells in your vagina. This is discharge and this is normal. Vaginal discharge is the body's way of keeping the vagina clean and healthy. Normal discharge is usually clear or white. It can sometimes look yellow when it dries on underwear.

Why does my discharge change?

You may notice that your discharge changes during the month, becoming heavy or watery during the middle of your cycle. You may have even noticed that your discharge has changed in the last year. This is because of your hormones. As your hormones change, your discharge will change too. It can even change color and become dark and brown before the start and at the end of your period.

When should I tell my doctor about my discharge?

You should always tell your doctor if you have concerns about discharge. You should talk to your provider if the discharge looks or smells different. You should also talk to your doctor if other symptoms are present—pain with using the bathroom, pain or burning in your vagina or other bumps/lumps in your vaginal area.

How do I know if I have an infection?

If your discharge looks white and clumpy and you have itching, it could mean you have a yeast infection. These are more common if you had to take antibiotics for another infection. If your discharge is green or pus-like that could be a sign of an infection. If your discharge has a fish like odor that can also be a sign of an infection. Your health care provider can help you determine if you have an infection by looking at a sample of the discharge under a microscope or by sending it to a lab for testing. You should make sure your provider knows if you are sexually active so that they can check for sexually transmitted infections that might be causing your vaginal discharge.

How do I prevent myself from getting a vaginal infection?

Be sure to wear cotton underwear and loose fitting pants. Change your underwear if you are sweaty and change your bathing suit after swimming. Do not clean your vagina with scented soaps or lotions. Do not use douches as they can make you more likely to get a vaginal infection. Optimal wiping and avoiding wearing daily sanitary pads will also be beneficial for prevention. Always practice safe sex by using a condom since some vaginal infections are sexually transmitted.