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### **Your Guide to Eliminating Yeast in Pregnancy**

Yeasts cells are organisms that all people have on their skin, all of the time. A yeast infection occurs when yeast cells grow rapidly, unchecked by healthy bacteria. For any number of reasons, when this type of imbalance occurs, an overgrowth of yeast can irritate the skin and may cause a variety of symptoms such as:

- ♥ White, thick, cottage-cheese-like vaginal discharge
- ♥ Red, itchy areas on the skin and/or painful rips, cracks, or fissures in the skin

Yeast infections are very common in pregnancy. Pregnant women are at increased risk for yeast infections because of naturally increased circulating sugar levels. Also, HIV positive women often experience chronic yeast infections due to a compromised immune system.

#### **Food as Medicine**

- ♥ Garlic is effective in combating yeast. Take garlic oil capsules by mouth (according to the directions on the bottle) and insert them vaginally at night for up to 6 weeks in order to eradicate yeast colonies.
- ♥ Sauerkraut is highly underrated as a food and for its medicinal properties. Raw, unprocessed sauerkraut is delicious and it is high in hydrogen-peroxide-producing lactobacilli (the type of bacteria that has been found to be highly effective in eliminating yeast). Add this food to your regular diet for its flavor and for its medicinal benefits!
- ♥ During pregnancy, your body allows increased levels of sugar to circulate so that your baby receives additional calories needed for growth. Unfortunately, yeast thrives on sugar, so you may not want to encourage its growth by eating refined sugar or refined wheat flour.
- ♥ Yogurt is often hailed as an effective yeast-fighting food, but it contains astonishingly high amounts of sugar (just read the label!). Many of its yeast-fighting bacteria are killed during pasteurization, and most of the bacteria are not hydrogen-peroxide-producing. Therefore, we advise avoiding yogurt as a treatment.

#### **Over-the-Counter Treatments**

- ♥ Seven-day, over-the-counter vaginal yeast treatments, containing the active ingredients miconazole or clotrimidazole, are available at your local pharmacy. They have been shown to be effective in curing most vaginal yeast infections. They are considered safe for use in pregnancy.
- ♥ “Pro-biotics” are mixtures of varying healthy bacteria and can be found in capsule form at your local health food store or food cooperative. Pro-biotics contain hydrogen-peroxide-producing lactobacilli, which are necessary for restoring balance to your system. You may take the allotted amount suggested on the label and insert the same amount vaginally at night for added effect.
- ♥ Please avoid using boric acid as a treatment for yeast. Although it is effective, it can cause caustic burns on the skin and it contains high levels of heavy metals, which may be harmful to your developing baby.

## **Herbal and Homeopathic Treatments**

- ♥ Lavender oil is assumed to be safe for use in pregnancy, and it has been shown to be effective in eliminating yeast. If you wish to try this treatment, use only high-quality lavender oil. Dip a peeled garlic clove into the oil and insert it vaginally at night. Remove it in the morning and insert a new one. Do this for a month for best results. You can also simmer lavender and garlic in a covered pot and use the “tea” as a sitz bath or poultice to comfort and treat your labia.
- ♥ Health-food stores and food cooperatives oftentimes sell herbal vaginal suppositories that are designed to treat yeast. Such suppositories are unlikely to completely eliminate yeast growth, but they feel very soothing and may even prevent the further proliferation of yeast colonies.
- ♥ Although tea tree oil is an effective treatment for yeast, we do not recommend you use it because its side effects for the fetus are unknown.
- ♥ If you are interested in treating a yeast infection with homeopathic medicine, we will be happy to refer you to a homeopath we know and trust. Treating chronic, systemic yeast infections with homeopathy is beyond our scope of training. Please ask us for a referral if you are interested.

## **Lifestyle**

- ♥ Yeast may be passed back and forth between sexual partners. If you are experiencing vaginal yeast symptoms, then your partner may be carrying yeast even if she/he is not exhibiting classic symptoms. Whichever treatments you decide to use, encourage your partner to use them as well.
- ♥ Since yeast prefer a warm, dark, moist environment in which to grow, we encourage you to wear underwear as little as possible. If you cannot go without underwear during the daytime, please sleep without bottoms on during the night. Also, yeast is very tenacious, so please wash your underwear after each single use. Consider soaking your underwear in a vinegar solution prior to washing, or use a bleach solution to wash them in. Remember to dry your underwear completely before putting them on. Since all-cotton underwear allows air to pass freely through its fibers, it is advised that you wear only all-cotton underwear. Avoid synthetic fibers altogether. Also, make sure that your pants fit comfortably. Wearing underwear or pants that are too tight encourages the growth of yeast.
- ♥ Whenever you bathe, avoid using soap on your inner labia. Use only warm water to rinse well. Gently pull back the hood of your clitoris and use warm water to thoroughly irrigate the entire clitoral area.
- ♥ Remember to always wipe from front to back after using the bathroom, and avoid using commercial products such as panty-liners and feminine hygiene sprays, both of which are likely to encourage the growth of yeast.

## **Lab Tests**

Almost all yeast infections are of the strain *Candida albicans*. All of the above treatments are based upon this assumption. If you find that you have tried some or all of the above treatments without relief from your symptoms, we can swab the affected area and send it to the lab for analysis. Occasionally, a varying strain of yeast will be identified, which means that you can explore strain-specific treatment options accordingly.