What is bacterial vaginosis?

Bacterial vaginosis is a vaginal inflammation caused by the overgrowth of bacteria known as Gardnerella vaginalis. This bacteria is naturally found in the vagina. Its excessive growth disrupts its natural balance.

Bacterial vaginosis usually affects women who are in their reproductive years, but it can affect women of any age.

It is the most common vaginal condition in women ages 15-44.

This infection occurs predominantly in females because of the structure of their reproductive system when compared to males.

What are the signs of bacterial vaginosis?

Although some women can get infected but show no clinical signs or symptoms.

Bacterial vaginosis is characterized by the following clinical features

1. A thick, grayish, and fishy-smelling vaginal discharge.
2. The discharge increases profusely after sexual intercourse.
3. Vaginal itching and irritation are not common,
4. Burning sensation during urination

What causes bacterial vaginosis?

Its cause and how some women get it is unknown but we know that it typically occurs in sexually active women.

The inflammation is caused by an overgrowth of bacteria in the vagina most commonly Gardnerella vaginalis. In the vagina there usually exists a balance between good bacteria that is, lactobacilli bacteria, and bad bacteria which as anaerobic bacteria. In bacterial vaginosis, there is excessive growth of bad bacteria exceeding the number of good bacteria, therefore, disrupting the balance in the vagina.

Some activities increase the risk of developing the disease such as;

- Having unprotected sex
- Vaginal douching
- Lack of good bacteria. (The lactobacilli bacteria).

What are the other causes of vaginal discharge?

Other common causes of vaginal discharge in females are

1. Candida vulvovaginitis
2. Trichomonas vaginalis
3. Gonorrhea
4. Bacterial vaginosis
5. Urethritis

Diagnosis

Bacterial vaginosis is diagnosed through a clinical assessment where your reproductive health provider will ask you questions regarding your complaint.

Expect to be asked questions such as:

- What is the color of your discharge?
- Is the discharge smelly?
- How long has been the discharge?

What is the treatment for bacterial vaginosis infection?

Bacterial vaginosis sometimes goes away without treatment.

If you suspect that you have the symptoms then you should be checked and treated by a qualified health practitioner.

It is important that you take all of the medicine prescribed to you, even if your symptoms go away.

Male sex partners of women diagnosed with BV generally do not need to be treated. BV may be transferred between female sex partners.

A healthcare provider can treat bacterial vaginosis with antibiotics. The treatment may also reduce the risk of some sexually transmitted diseases.

The common medication used in treatment is metronidazole (Flagyl) tablets 400 milligrams three times a day for 5-7 days or clindamycin depending on the severity.

Your partner also needs to be treated the same so as to reduce the chances of getting reinfected.

You also need to take plenty of clean water to help in flushing out the bacteria.

How can you prevent developing bacterial vaginosis

You can reduce the risk of developing bacterial vaginosis by;

- Abstinence from intercourse
- Practicing protected sex by using latex condoms whenever you are having sexual intercourse.
- Limit the number of your sexual partners.
- Minimize vaginal irritation by using mild, nondeodorant soaps or pads.

- Avoid douching. Frequent douching disrupts the vaginal balance and may increase your risk of vaginal infection. Remember that, douching does not clear up a vaginal infection.

How does bacterial vaginosis affect pregnancy and the unborn baby?

Pregnant women can also get bacterial vaginosis.

Once affected they are more likely to give birth to premature babies or newborns with low birth weight than pregnant women without the infection.

Treatment is especially important for pregnant women.