



## YEAST INFECTIONS

### Summary

Yeast infections are very common fungal infections in HIV positive women. There is a wide variety of treatment options available.

### What is a yeast infection?

A yeast infection is the common name for a fungal infection of the vagina or vulva. It is caused by an overgrowth of *Candida*, a fungus that is normally found in the mouth, gastrointestinal tract and vagina, as well as on the skin. *Candida* is part of the normal “flora” of bacteria and fungi that live in or on the human body. *Candida* causes health problems only when there is an overgrowth.

### What are the symptoms of a yeast infection?

A yeast infection can cause an itching or burning feeling of the skin outside the vagina, and a thick, white vaginal discharge. Many women get yeast infections, but HIV positive women may get them more often and they may be more difficult to control. Yeast infections can appear at any CD4+ count, but they may become more severe as the count drops.

### Diagnosis

Yeast infections may be diagnosed on the basis of symptoms and the patient’s history. The doctor may also take a swab of the vagina and have the sample examined under a microscope to be certain that *Candida* is the cause of the symptoms.

### Prevention

Because the *Candida* fungus naturally lives in or on our bodies, it is impossible to avoid it. However, there are several ways to help keep it under control.

- Cutting down on sugars and starchy food has been suggested as a way of helping to control candidiasis.
- Unsweetened yogurt with live bacterial culture (*Lactobacillus acidophilus*) is a popular remedy for yeast infections. Eating 8 ounces of “live” yoghurt every day may help reduce yeast infections. Supplements of *Lactobacillus acidophilus* are often available at health food stores. Taking capsules or 1 teaspoon of acidophilus powder with meals may help control yeast infections.

### Treatment

The treatments for yeast infections can be divided into two groups:

- **topical treatments** (creams and lozenges), where the drug is in direct contact with the inside of the vagina by insertion
- **systemic treatments** (pills or capsules), where the drug is circulated throughout the body by the blood



**Topical treatments** are cheap and have almost no side effects. However, they can be messy and often take longer to work than systemic treatments. Although they are convenient, systemic treatments are more expensive and they may cause side effects or interactions with other drugs.

The most common topical treatments for yeast infections are clotrimazole (Canesten, Clotrimaderm, Myclo-Gyne) or miconazole (Micozole, Monistat) creams or suppositories that are inserted into the vagina.

The most effective **systemic treatment** for yeast infections is 150 mg fluconazole (sold under the brand name Diflucan) taken once a day for one to three days. Systemic treatments may also be prescribed for yeast infections that don't clear up with topical treatments or for infections that keep coming back. Usually, 200 mg fluconazole (Diflucan) or 400 mg ketoconazole (Nizoral) are taken daily for up to 14 days.

## Credits

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Created: January 2001

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## Disclaimer

**Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatments in question.**

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Funding has been provided by Health Canada,  
under the Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDS.

