Yeast infection with condom use? [1]

Dear Alice,

It seems that lately, whenever I have not had sex with my boyfriend for several days and then we do have sex, I get symptoms very similar to those of a yeast infection (mostly severe itching). Is there any connection between sex and yeast infections? Could it possibly be something else? (I have heard that it is possible to be allergic to the latex in condoms...)? This really bothers me because it happens rather frequently and is excruciating. I don't think it is possible that my partner also has a yeast infection and we are passing it back and forth, since we always use condoms. Please help! This is driving me crazy.

Signed,
Completely Confused

Answer

Dear Completely Confused,

Since you sound uncertain and anxious about whether or not you have a yeast infection, see your health care provider, if you haven't already, to figure out the cause of your symptoms and give you some peace of mind.

Most women who get yeast infections do not get them from sexual contact. You may want to think about other possible explanations for yeast infections:

- Taking antibiotics
- Hormonal changes
- Some medical conditions, like diabetes, can cause yeast infections
- Using some feminine hygiene products (such as douches and deodorant sprays)
- Not keeping the vaginal area dry

If you or your partner does have a yeast infection, condoms can prevent the transmission with perfect use. So, if you don't always use condoms consistently, or sometimes use them incorrectly, it's possible that you could still contract an infection, whether yeast or something different, such as bacterial vaginosis (an inflammation of the vagina.) Keep in mind that you could also develop a yeast infection if your boyfriend has thrush, a yeast infection of the oral cavity, when he has oral sex with you. Using a dental dam during oral sex can prevent this kind of transmission.
It may also be that your symptoms aren't due to a yeast infection. Other possible causes of your vaginal problems may be

- An overgrowth of normal vaginal bacteria, which can cause an irritating discharge and inflammation of the vulva that are aggravated by sexual intercourse
- An irritation caused by the condom material, spermicide, and/or lubricant coating the condoms

Again, your health care provider can help you get to the root of the problem.

If you're truly allergic to latex condoms, you could experience a skin rash, dryness, itchiness, and/or eczema, and these symptoms are usually severe. For some, these reactions tend to develop immediately after first contact with latex. For others, these reactions develop after repeated exposure. If you experience milder adverse reactions, you may be sensitive to latex. Consider trying a female condom, which is made of a soft plastic material, polyurethane, or polyurethane male condoms. Polyurethane condoms are unlikely to cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. If lubricant is your potential problem, then switch to another condom brand that is coated with a different lubricant, or purchase non-lubricated condoms and use a dab of water-based lubricant. If spermicide is what could be irritating you, then stop using condoms with nonoxynol-9, which causes allergic reactions in some people. All of these options are available at your local drug and other convenience store.

If you need more information or help in figuring out if you're possibly sensitive or allergic to latex, lubricant, and/or spermicide, you can see a health care provider or your gynecologist, nurse practitioner, or primary care provider. FYI, vaginal irritations caused by latex sensitivity can be hard to distinguish from other vaginal infections because of the common symptoms of itchiness and dryness. In general, however, latex sensitivity reactions do not cause extensive vaginal discharge.

For more information, check out the Related Q&As.

Alice!
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