Dear Alice,

I am a healthy 17 year old runner who has never had a yeast infection but I'm scared I might get one some day. I've heard rumors about what to do to prevent them, like wear cotton underwear, don't wear spandex, and eat yogurt. Are these good ideas? Is there anything else I can do to prevent a yeast infection?

? Healthy Woman

Answer

Dear Healthy Woman,

While you need not spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about getting a yeast infection, it is smart to think about how to prevent one.

To prevent a yeast infection in the first place, follow these general tips:

- Follow a nutritious eating plan. Eating yogurt that contains live cultures of *Lactobacillus acidophilus* has been shown to be especially beneficial in counteracting yeast. For more information, you can take a look at Yogurt for yeast infections? [2].
- Get enough sleep. This will keep your body's defenses working well, making you less prone to infections.
- Avoid using scented, deodorant, and/or antibacterial products in and around the genital area. These include soaps, sprays, powders, toilet paper, tampons, or other feminine hygiene products.
- Wear pads or panty-liners only when you are menstruating or spotting.
- Don't use douches. Douching may alter the normal balance of "good" and "bad" vaginal bacteria as well as spread the "bad" organisms from the vagina into the uterus and fallopian tubes, causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).
- Avoid unnecessary use of antibiotics. Like douching, antibiotics can change the normal balance of vaginal organisms.
- Keep your vaginal area dry. Change out of your swimming suit as soon as possible after swimming. Warm and moist environments are great breeding grounds for yeast.
- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet. This will help to minimize the spread of fecal bacteria to the vagina.

Because cotton breathes more easily than synthetic fabrics, many women find that wearing
cotton underwear decreases their risk of developing a yeast infection. Avoiding tight fitting clothing also helps by decreasing body heat and moisture in the vaginal area.

While a yeast infection is certainly not a pleasant experience, there's no need to spend too much time worrying. Yeast is a normal part of your vaginal canal, but sometimes the growth gets out of hand. A yeast infection may be uncomfortable, but it is easy to treat and manage. Take a look at the related Q&As for information about treating a yeast infection and the possibilities for passing it on to your sexual partner(s).

Alice!
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Sexual & Reproductive Health
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)
Yeast Infection

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