What is cervicitis? [1]

Alice,

What is cervicitis? How is it formed? Is it an STD or bacteria from normal vaginas?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Cervicitis is the inflammation and infection of the cervix (the base of the uterus that opens into the back of the vagina). Cervicitis is most often caused by a sexually transmitted infection (such as the herpes virus, the bacterial infections gonorrhea and chlamydia, or the protozoan parasite trichomoniasis), but can also be caused by injury or trauma to the cervix or from allergic reactions to certain chemicals that are placed in the vagina (including those in latex condoms, spermicides, tampons, or douches).

Cervicitis can be hard to diagnose because some women can have chronic (long-term) inflammation of their cervix and experience no symptoms. In these cases, the infection is usually diagnosed by a health care provider during routine gynecological care (another good reason to schedule an annual exam). When cervicitis does cause symptoms they can range from mild to severe and can include:

- vaginal discharge that may have a strong smell, contain pus, and/or become heavier right after menstruation
- "spotting" between periods or after intercourse
- genital itching and burning, pelvic pain, and/or pain during intercourse
- painful, burning urination
- lower back pain

Women's health care providers can diagnose cervicitis through a visual inspection, culture of the tissue and discharge on or around the cervix, or a Pap smear. Once cervicitis is diagnosed, treatment depends on the cause and severity of the infection. Infections caused by bacterial STIs (such as gonorrhea) are usually treated with antibiotics or other medications.
If the inflammation is caused by an allergic reaction or irritation, the provider may suggest removing the source (i.e., stop douching, using scented tampons, etc.) and watching to make sure that the irritation subsides. Women who have chronic cervicitis can benefit from a treatment (typically cautery, cryosurgery, or laser surgery) that removes any abnormal cell growth from the cervix's outer surface, allowing new healthy tissue to grow in its place.

It is important to get cervicitis (and other gynecological infections) diagnosed in the early stages, because if left untreated, it can increase a woman's risks for infertility and problems in pregnancy, including miscarriage and premature labor. If you think you might have cervicitis, it would be a good idea to visit your health care provider. Students at Columbia can make an appointment at Primary Care Medical Services through Open Communicator or by calling x4-2284.

Alice!
Category:
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Other STI's

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