

Vaginal Discharge: What's Normal? What's Not?

All women have vaginal discharge; the fluid or secretions that come out of your vagina and you often see on your underwear. It is usually normal and healthy but sometimes discharge is a sign of infection. Knowing what is normal discharge can help you tell if there is something wrong. You are the best person to know your body and monitor your health.

Normal Vaginal Discharge

Normal vaginal discharge may be a combination of secretions from the vulva, vagina, fallopian tubes, uterus and cervix. The amount, consistency and colour of vaginal discharge changes as hormones in our bodies change throughout the menstrual cycle. This chart describes normal cervical discharge.

Cycle Day	Type of Discharge	Cause
1-7	menstrual bleeding begins and ends (your period)	lining of uterus sheds because pregnancy did not occur
8-13	small amounts of creamy discharge (usually white)	pre-ovulation, estrogen hormone rises
14-16	increased amounts of cloudy to clear, discharge may have stringy consistency	ovulation occurs
17-28	Small amounts of thicker discharge or none at all	post-ovulation

Sexual arousal fluid is also normal vaginal discharge. During sexual arousal the vagina produces a clear or cloudy fluid that makes penetration easier and more enjoyable. This fluid also helps condoms from breaking. If you do not feel well lubricated try more stimulation before penetration or using a water-based lubricant such as KY Jelly.

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Kingston
221 Portsmouth Avenue
Kingston, ON K7M 1V5
Tel: 613-549-1232
1-800-267-7875
Fax: 613-549-7896

Cloyne
P.O. Box 59
14209 Highway 41
Cloyne, ON K0H 1K0
Tel: 613-336-8989
Fax: 613-336-0522

Napanee
41 Dundas Street
Napanee, ON
K7R 1Z5
Tel: 613-354-3357
Fax: 354-6267

Sharbot Lake
P.O. Box 149
1130 Elizabeth Street
Sharbot Lake, ON K0H 2P0
Tel: 613-279-2151
Fax: 613-279-3997

Abnormal Discharge

There are different types of bacteria that naturally live in your vagina. They work together in balance to protect you from infection. Sometimes the bacteria can become imbalanced and you may notice an abnormal discharge.

There are many reasons why a woman may experience abnormal discharge including: being tired or run down, douching, being pregnant, taking birth control pills or other medications, having certain medical conditions, allergic reactions, irritations of vagina, and sexually transmitted infections.

Here is what to look for:

- yellowish, greenish, or grayish in colour,
- watery or extremely thick,
- foul smell,
- frothy, curdy, or pus-like, or
- itching or burning sensation.

If you are experiencing abnormal vaginal discharge you can:

- call your family physician,
- go to an after hours or urgent care clinic, or
- call the Sexual Health Clinic at 613-549-1232 (ext 1213) to book an appointment or come to one of the drop-in clinics (no appointment necessary). Drop in clinics are every Tuesday and Thursday from 4:00 p.m.- 6:00 p.m.

How to prevent vaginal infections:

- wipe from front to back,
- wash your vulva and bottom every day,
- avoid douching,
- avoid the use of strong soaps, vaginal sprays, bath oils, and bubble bath,
- avoid scented tampons, pads, and toilet paper,
- wear cotton underwear and avoid tight pants,
- pat your vulva dry after bathing,
- cut down on the amount of sugar you eat,
- limit your sexual partners, and
- use condoms for protection for sexually transmitted infections.

References: The V Book (2002)