

COSMOPOLITAN

EXPERTS

sex advice

from Amy Levine, Cosmo's Carnal Counselor

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"What causes a yeast infection -- and can I give it to my guy?"

Q I think I might have a yeast infection. What could have caused it, and can my man catch it if we have sex?

A A yeast infection is caused by an overgrowth of a fungus called Candida that is normally found in small amounts in the vagina. However, certain factors -- such as birth-control pills, antibiotics, douches, stress, an allergic reaction, damp underwear or tight clothing around the vaginal area -- can cause the fungus to overpopulate, causing annoying symptoms. These include vaginal inflammation, burning or itching; a fresh, breadlike smell or other unpleasant odor; and a thick, white, cottage-cheese-like discharge. The condition can be treated with over-the-counter remedies, but it's a good idea to see your doctor to rule out other types of infections that have similar symptoms.

While it's possible to pass it to your guy during intercourse, it's unlikely. If he is infected, he may experience painful urination or have an irritated penis or scrotum. It's also possible, though very rare, to transmit the infection during oral sex, which would be indicated by a sore throat, burning on the lips or tongue, or whitish spots inside the mouth (known as thrush). If he has any of these symptoms, he should visit his doctor to be diagnosed and treated.

Even though your chances of passing it to your guy are slim, you should still temporarily refrain from having sex. Penetration can be painful; the medication to treat the infection can deteriorate latex (putting you at risk of getting pregnant if you use a condom, cervical cap or diaphragm for birth control); and if your guy ejaculates inside you, the alkaline components of his semen might exacerbate your condition. But once the course of the treatment is completed (it usually takes one to seven days depending on what type of medication you're on), and you're symptom-free, you can be as randy as you want.