

Understanding Vaginal Discharge During Pregnancy



Highlights

Vaginal discharge helps keep your vagina clean and moist and plays a role in preventing infections.

It's normal to experience more vaginal discharge during pregnancy, but it should resemble your usual discharge in appearance.

During pregnancy, there is an increased risk of developing vaginal thrush or bacterial vaginosis, which can cause abnormal vaginal discharge.

Before labor, you might notice a "show," which is a sticky vaginal discharge that seals your cervix during pregnancy.

Always consult your doctor or midwife if your discharge changes in color, consistency, or smell compared to your usual vaginal discharge.

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How Vaginal Discharge Works

Vaginal discharge is a fluid that helps keep your vagina clean and moist. It assists in preventing infections from developing in the vagina.

Normal vaginal discharge changes throughout your menstrual cycle, as well as during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Vaginal discharge varies from person to person-some individuals may have a lot of discharge, while others may have a lighter amount. Typically, vaginal discharge is clear, white, or cream-colored and should not have a strong odor.

The vagina contains beneficial bacteria called lactobacilli, which help maintain its health. If the balance of bacteria is disrupted, and there is an overgrowth of yeast or harmful bacteria, it can lead to abnormal vaginal discharge.

Abnormal vaginal discharge is often caused by an infection. It can also be triggered by certain medications, health conditions, or products that irritate your vulva or vagina.

Pregnancy and Vaginal Discharge

It's common to notice an increase in vaginal discharge when pregnant. This is known as leucorrhoea. It generally appears clear or white and doesn't have a strong smell.

Increased vaginal discharge during pregnancy is caused by higher levels of estrogen and progesterone in the body.

Changes to Watch For

While it's normal to experience more vaginal discharge during pregnancy, the discharge itself should resemble your usual discharge.

Your discharge may be abnormal if it:

Appears green, yellow, brown, or gray

Has a foul odor

Contains blood

Changes in texture, becoming thin and runny, resembling cottage cheese, or frothy

Is accompanied by itching or pain

When to Call a Doctor

Contact your doctor or midwife immediately if you experience any bleeding or fluid leaking from your vagina during pregnancy.

Consult your doctor if you notice vaginal discharge that is unusual for you, as it could indicate an infection.

Your doctor will ask about your discharge and any other symptoms you are experiencing. They may recommend a swab test to check for an infection.

If an infection is detected, your doctor will prescribe the appropriate treatment. Certain infections can lead to pregnancy complications, so it's important to consult a doctor if your discharge changes.

Some infections that you are at a higher risk of developing during pregnancy include:

Vaginal thrush

Bacterial vaginosis

Vaginal Discharge vs. 'Show'

A "show" refers to a specific type of discharge from your vagina that may occur just before labor.

During pregnancy, a mucus plug seals the cervix to prevent infections. As the cervix begins to dilate in preparation for labor, the mucus plug is expelled.

This is referred to as a "show," which may appear watery, sticky, or jelly-like. It may contain blood or appear pink or brown.

If you notice bright red blood that is not mixed with mucus, contact your doctor or midwife immediately as it is likely not a "show."

Discharge or Waters Breaking?

During pregnancy, your baby is contained within a sac filled with amniotic fluid. When this sac breaks, it releases the amniotic fluid, which is known as your "waters breaking" or "rupture of membranes."

You will feel liquid trickling or gushing from your vagina, and it will be uncontrollable. Sometimes, it may be difficult to distinguish between amniotic fluid and vaginal discharge.

The breaking of your waters usually occurs during labor but can happen earlier, and occasionally it might occur before reaching full term. Contact your doctor or midwife immediately if this happens to you.

Tools and Assistance

Doctor or Midwife Consultation: Always consult with your healthcare provider if you experience any changes in your vaginal discharge during pregnancy. A medical professional can help identify any infections and recommend safe treatments or actions.

Swab Tests: Your doctor may perform swab tests to check for infections such as vaginal thrush or bacterial vaginosis. This will allow them to prescribe the appropriate treatment.

Personal Hygiene Practices: Maintain good hygiene by washing with warm water and avoiding scented soaps or products. This helps keep the vaginal area healthy and may prevent unnecessary irritation.

Maternity Care Guidance: Your midwife or doctor will provide specific advice on managing vaginal discharge and what is considered normal, offering additional information if you have concerns regarding infections or abnormal symptoms.

Medical Treatments: If an infection is diagnosed, your doctor may recommend antifungal or antibacterial treatments. These treatments are safe for use during pregnancy and can help alleviate symptoms of infections like vaginal thrush or bacterial vaginosis.

Monitoring Changes: Keep track of any changes in your vaginal discharge, such

as color, smell, or consistency, and notify your healthcare provider if you notice any abnormalities.