

MANAGING YOUR GONORRHEA

What Is Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that is caused by bacteria. It usually affects the sex organs but may also occur in other parts of the body, such as the eyes, throat, and joints.

Untreated gonorrhea can lead to serious problems, including pharyngitis, tonsillitis, severe arthritis, and bloodstream infection. In women, it can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and can be passed from pregnant women to their babies during birth. In men, it can cause infections called urethritis and epididymitis. Urethritis is inflammation (swelling, redness) of the urethra, the tube that carries urine and semen through the penis. Epididymitis is inflammation or infection of the epididymis, a long tube above and behind each testicle.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that more than 1.5 million people in the United States get gonorrhea every year. Gonorrhea can be acquired at any age but more than one half of infections in the US are between the ages of 15-24 years old.

What Causes Gonorrhea?

The cause is a type of bacteria named *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. It spreads very easily by having genital, oral, or anal sex with an infected person.

What Are the Symptoms of Gonorrhea?

Most men have symptoms when first infected, but many women may have very mild or no symptoms. They often don't know that they have gonorrhea until they have other problems.

Symptoms in men usually start within 2 weeks after exposure. They include creamy green-yellow discharge from the penis, pain when urinating, and painful and swollen testicles.

Symptoms in women include pain or burning when urinating, yellow or green vaginal discharge

that can be bloody, bleeding between periods, and pain during sex. Other symptoms may include sore throat, low-grade fever; tender lower abdomen (belly); pain in knees, ankles, or elbows; and a rash on the palms of the hands.

How Is Gonorrhea Diagnosed?

For diagnosis, the health care provider asks about symptoms and sexual activity and examines the sexual organs, including the pelvic area for women. Blood and urine tests and tests will be done. Tests for bacterial genes (DNA) can be done from a urine sample and can be used to diagnose gonorrhea. A sample of discharge from the penis or cervix may be taken and sent to a laboratory for study. Throat, rectum, or eye discharges may also be tested if necessary.

How Is Gonorrhea Treated?

Treatment with antibiotics cures gonorrhea in 1 to 2 weeks. An antibiotic called ceftriaxone is given by intramuscular injection. Uncomplicated gonorrhea is usually treated with one dose of antibiotics. However, patients who do not improve after treatment should be re-tested because they may have gonorrhea resistant to ceftriaxone or may have developed a new gonorrhea infection.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Gonorrhea

- ✓ **DO** practice safe sex. Use condoms if you think that there's any chance of catching an STD.
- ✓ **DO** get treatment as soon as possible.
- ✓ **DO** make sure your sexual partner visits a health care provider to check for infection.
- ✓ **DO** realize that gonorrhea is often diagnosed with other STDs. Your health care provider will also test you for other STDs.

- ✓ **DO** wash hands thoroughly and often after using the bathroom.
- ✓ **DO** use sitz baths for discomfort.
- ✓ **DO** remember that follow-up cultures should be done.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you get fever, chills, and abdominal pain after treatment starts.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you get joint pain, genital sores, or swollen testicles.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you were told that a sexual contact has gonorrhea.
- ⊗ **DON'T** have sex for at least 1 week after starting treatment and until your sex partners have also been tested and treated for gonorrhea. This is important to avoid spreading the infection.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Infectious Diseases Society of America: Tel: (703) 299-0200; Website:
<http://www.idsociety.org>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tel: (404) 639-3534; Website:
www.cdc.gov/std/gonorrhea/default.htm

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