Trichomoniasis symptoms & treatment

Fast Facts

• Trichomoniasis is an STI caused by a tiny parasite.
• You may not experience any symptoms with trichomoniasis, so it’s important to get tested.
• Trichomoniasis can be treated easily with a short course of antibiotics.
• As with other STIs, trichomoniasis increases your chances of getting other STIs, including HIV.

What is trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis, or trich (pronounced trick), is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a tiny parasite called Trichomonas vaginalis (TV).

"I got an STI. Fortunately it wasn't serious among all the possibilities. I caught trichomoniasis, which is a parasite that can reside in the vagina, and the man can transmit it without knowing it, because it rarely shows symptoms on men. Symptoms on women are not nice. The solution was easy, I took the prescribed medicine and I was cured, and told him to take the medicine as well." - Luna

How do you get trichomoniasis?

It’s passed on through unprotected sex (not using a condom) and occasionally by sharing sex toys.1

Safer sex is the best way to prevent trichomoniasis. This means using a condom every time
you have sex (vaginal, anal or oral). For oral sex, a dental dam can be used to cover the female genitals. Cover any sex toys you use with a condom, wash them after use and use a new condom for each partner.2

If you’re worried about trichomoniasis or have had unprotected sex, make sure you get tested.

What do trichomoniasis symptoms look like?

Like many STIs, there may be no symptoms at all (in half of men and women) – but for those who do develop symptoms, they normally appear within a month of infection.

In women, symptoms include:

- yellow-green vaginal discharge which may have an unpleasant smell
- soreness, swelling and itching in and around the vagina
- pain when passing urine or having sex
- pain in the lower stomach

For men, there may be:

- thin, white discharge from the penis
- pain or a burning sensation when urinating
- soreness, swelling and redness around the head of the penis and foreskin

You can't diagnose trichomoniasis by looking at pictures because symptoms vary from person to person. See your doctor or healthcare worker if you think you have trichomoniasis.

Can I get tested for trichomoniasis?

You can be tested for trichomoniasis whether you have symptoms or not.

You will need to see your doctor or healthcare worker who will examine your genital area for any visible symptoms and take a swab taken from either the vagina or penis. A urine sample can also be taken from a man.

It takes just a few days for the results to come back. If the doctor strongly suspects you have the infection, treatment may be offered before you get your results.4

You may also be tested for other STIs such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea.

How is trichomoniasis treated?

Trichomoniasis is easily treated. Caught early, it can be cured with antibiotics (usually Metronidazole) either taken twice daily for five to seven days or in a single, larger dose.5

To avoid re-infection, avoid having sex during your treatment. Any recent sexual partners should also be tested and treated.

What happens if I don't get treatment for trichomoniasis?

Complications of trichomoniasis are rare; however, as with other STIs, trichomoniasis increases your chances of getting other STIs, including HIV.6

If you’re pregnant, trichomoniasis can be passed on to your baby and can cause your baby to be born prematurely or underweight.7
Photo credit: ©iStock.com/Andrey Prokhorov

1. NHS Choices 'Trichomoniasis' [accessed 28 October 2015]
2. NHS Choices 'Trichomoniasis - Prevention' [accessed 28 October 2015]
3. NHS Choices 'Trichomoniasis' [accessed 14 April 2016]
4. NHS Choices 'Trichomoniasis - Diagnosis' [accessed 28 October 2015]
5. NHS Choices 'Trichomoniasis - Treatment' [accessed 28 October 2015]
6. NHS Choices 'Trichomoniasis' [accessed 28 October 2015]

Last updated: 21 June 2017

Last full review: 01 May 2015

Next full review: 01 May 2018