Trichomoniasis symptoms & treatment

FAST FACTS

- Trichomoniasis is a tiny parasite found in the vagina and urethra (the tube that carries urine – pee – out of the body) or the head of the penis or prostate gland (a gland near the bladder that helps produce semen).
- It is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that can be passed on through sex without a condom or sharing sex toys with someone who has trichomoniasis (even if they don’t have symptoms).
- Trichomoniasis can be prevented by using male and female condoms, dental dams and latex gloves during sex.
- A simple examination and a swab or urine (pee) test carried out by a healthcare professional will show whether you have trichomoniasis.
- Trichomoniasis can be easily treated with antibiotics.

If you’ve had unprotected sex, or you are worried about trichomoniasis or other STIs, get tested as soon as possible – even if you don’t have symptoms.

What is trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis, or trich (pronounced trick), is a caused by a tiny parasite called Trichomonas vaginalis (TV).
How serious is trichomoniasis?

It is easily treated and cured, but getting trichomoniasis while pregnant can cause low birth weight in newborn babies, if left untreated.

How do you get trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis is easily passed on and you can get it if you:

- have vaginal sex without a condom with someone who has trichomoniasis (even if they don't have symptoms)
- share sex toys that aren't washed or covered with a new condom each time they are used – although this is less common.

Trichomoniasis isn’t passed on through oral or anal sex, kissing or hugging.

Trichomoniasis, HIV and sexual health

- Having an STI, including trichomoniasis, increases your risk of getting HIV.
- If someone living with HIV also has trichomoniasis, their viral load will increase, which will make them more likely to pass on HIV if they have sex without a condom, even if they are taking HIV drugs (antiretrovirals).
- However, if someone has an undetectable viral load, there’s no evidence that trichomoniasis makes them more likely to pass on HIV.
- If you're taking antiretrovirals, it’s important to discuss with your doctor how treatment for trichomoniasis may interact with your HIV drugs.

If you're worried about HIV, find out everything you need to know in our HIV Transmission and Prevention section.

How do you prevent yourself and others from getting trichomoniasis?

- Use a new male or female condom or dental dam every time you have vaginal sex.
- The parasite can infect areas that are not covered by a condom – so be aware that condoms may not provide full protection.
- Cover sex toys with a new condom and wash them after use.
- Having multiple sexual partners can also increase your risk of getting trichomoniasis. If you are having sex with multiple partners, it’s even more important to use condoms and have regular STI tests.
- Discuss your sexual health with your partner. Knowing each other’s sexual health status can help you decide together how to have safer sex.
- If you know you have trichomoniasis, wait until you have finished your treatment before having sex again.
Note condoms are the best form of protection against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. Taking PrEP doesn’t prevent trichomoniasis or pregnancy.

Ask your healthcare professional for more advice.

What do trichomoniasis symptoms look like?

Many people with trichomoniasis don’t have any symptoms. If you do get symptoms, they normally appear within a month of infection.

Symptoms for women include:

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

Symptoms for men include:

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

Can I get tested for trichomoniasis?

Yes – a healthcare professional can examine you and take a swab from the vagina or the penis. A urine sample can also be taken from a man.

If you have trichomoniasis you should be tested for other STIs. It is important that you tell any recent sexual partners so they can also get tested and treated. Many people who have trichomoniasis do not notice anything wrong, and by telling them you can help to stop the parasite being passed on; and it can also stop you from getting trichomoniasis again.

How is trichomoniasis treated?

Trichomoniasis is easily treated with antibiotics. Make sure you take the treatment as prescribed and finish your course of antibiotics.

Whether you have symptoms or not, don’t have sex again until you have finished your treatment, and if you can it’s a good idea to check back in with a healthcare professional before having sex again.

If you have had trichomoniasis and been treated you are not immune – this means you can still get infected again.

Complications of trichomoniasis?

- As with most STIs, having trichomoniasis makes you more likely to get other STIs, including HIV.
A pregnant woman with trichomoniasis can pass it on to her unborn baby, which can cause babies to be born prematurely or underweight.

Without treatment, the infection can last for months or even years.

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Sources:
NHS (2015) 'Trichomoniasis'
CDC (2017) 'Trichomoniasis'