



Advising on women's intimate health

Despite millions of women across the UK experiencing vaginal infections, many women feel too embarrassed, self-conscious or reluctant to seek advice. This means they may delay getting help, misinterpret their symptoms or continue to live with discomfort unnecessarily.

THIS TRAINING WILL HELP YOU TO:

Understand the causes and prevalence of common women's intimate health conditions

Be able to identify key symptoms of common vaginal infections and vaginal dryness

Provide evidence-based self-care advice and appropriate product recommendations

Vaginal infections (vaginitis)

A normal vaginal microbiome is dominated by good bacteria which maintains the pH below 4.5.^{1,2} Many factors, including sexual activity, the use of vaginal douches, menstruation and increasing age² can affect the pH of the vagina, causing a change in the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina,³ which can result in vaginitis, such as bacterial vaginosis (BV) or thrush.^{2,4}

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

BV is characterised by a disruption of the normal vaginal microbiota, with a reduction in Lactobacillus species and an overgrowth of anaerobic bacteria.⁴ It is the most common cause of unusual vaginal discharge in women of childbearing age.⁴ 35-50% of women are estimated to get BV at some point in their life, with nearly half of women experiencing a recurrence within one year.⁵

Usual treatment involves antibiotic tablets or gels containing metronidazole, or vaginal cream containing clindamycin.^{3,4} Metronidazole can interact with various other medicines as well as alcohol, and clindamycin cream can weaken latex condoms and diaphragms.⁴

These drugs can also negatively affect the vaginal microbiome.⁶

Thrush

Thrush is a fungal infection caused by an overgrowth of yeasts from the Candida species (commonly Candida albicans).⁷ It is the second most common vaginal condition after BV, affecting three out of four women in their lifetime.⁸

Common treatments include antifungal creams or pessaries containing clotrimazole or miconazole, and oral antifungal medication containing fluconazole.^{9,10}

Antifungal creams may damage condoms and diaphragms, affecting their contraceptive efficacy.⁹

Oral antifungal medications should be taken with caution in older adults due to age-related physiology and comorbidities.

As a leading women's health brand, Balance Activ's mission is to empower women to take control of their intimate health through expert advice and dependable solutions that work in harmony with the body. As such, it focuses on non-drug-based solutions for these common intimate health conditions.

More than 60% of women mistake BV symptoms for thrush.¹¹ Making a correct diagnosis is important because untreated BV can have complications, e.g. an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), pelvic inflammatory disease (which may affect fertility), miscarriage, preterm birth and low-birth-weight infants.¹²

Balance Activ want to stop the mystery surrounding diagnosis, so have created a free online Symptom Checker to help women better understand their symptoms and support decision-making on next steps at **balanceactiv.com** – it has been used over 1.2 million times!

What are the symptoms?

	BV ^{*3,4}	Thrush ^{7,9,10}
Discharge	Thin, watery, greyish discharge or abnormally large amount of discharge	Typically thick, white discharge, similar to cottage cheese, but may be thin or absent
Smell	A strong fishy smell (particularly after sex)	No smell
Discomfort	Occasional discomfort	Soreness and stinging during sex or when urinating Redness and irritation of skin surrounding the vulva
Itching	No itching or soreness	Intense itching or burning

*About half of women with BV do not have any symptoms³

Red flags - when to refer



Refer a customer with BV if:¹³

- Vaginal discharge is described as green, yellow or frothy
- Discharge is accompanied by pelvic pain or bleeding
- There are blisters and sores.



Refer a customer with thrush if:⁹

- They have symptoms of thrush for the first time
- They have thrush and are under 16 or over 60
- Thrush keeps coming back (more than 4 times in 12 months)
- Thrush treatment has not worked
- They have thrush and are pregnant or breastfeeding
- They have thrush and a weakened immune system, e.g. due to diabetes, HIV or chemotherapy.

Balance Activ products for BV and thrush

Balance Activ BV treatment

The UK's No. 1 Bacterial Vaginosis brand** is clinically proven to provide relief from symptoms of BV,⁵ for a dependable, natural, drug-free alternative



- Non-antibiotic formulation designed to support physiological vaginal pH and microbiome balance to treat and relieve BV symptoms
- Lactic acid replenishes the body's natural lactic acid, lowering the pH levels to promote the growth of good bacteria (e.g. Lactobacilli)² and restore a natural vaginal balance
- Glycogen encourages good bacteria² and maintains pH balance

Balance Activ gel may degrade some types of condoms and its use is not advisable to use it with the contraceptive vaginal ring.

Balance Activ Thrush Cream

Designed to support the natural vaginal environment, helps relieve symptoms and prevents the recurrence of thrush



- Forms a protective barrier over the irritated area to inhibit the growth of harmful bacteria, allowing the body to fight the cause of infection
- Provides effective relief of vaginal itching, redness and soreness
- Restores and maintains an optimal vaginal pH level to promote a healthy vaginal flora and prevent thrush from recurring
- Safe to use with latex condoms

Vaginal dryness

The vaginal lining is naturally lubricated to keep the tissue thick, elastic and comfortable. Oestrogen plays a key role in maintaining this moisture and when levels of this hormone fall, the vaginal tissue can become thin, less elastic and dry, leading to vaginal dryness.¹⁵

Reduced oestrogen after menopause often leads to thinning of the vaginal walls (vaginal atrophy), making vaginal dryness particularly common; more than half of post-menopausal women experience vaginal dryness. But dryness can occur at any age — around 17% of women aged 18-50 also report dryness during sex.¹³ This occurs because less moisture in the vagina means less moisture in the external genitals too. As well as during sex, this dryness or irritation can also be felt during normal activities like walking or sitting, affecting the quality of life of many women.¹⁴

Symptoms of vaginal dryness include:¹⁴

- Burning and itching
- Bleeding after sex (due to vaginal wall tissues breaking open)
- Soreness in the vulva
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) or thrush
- An increased need to urinate
- Less interest in sex.

Vaginal moisturisers can help with vaginal dryness.¹⁴

Balance Activ products for vaginal dryness

Hervitality Moisture Gel

- ✓ Restores moisture
- ✓ Clinically tested to provide fast*** and long-lasting*** relief from intimate dryness and discomfort. Independent tests found:

After one application of Hervitality Moisture Gel:

- 56% of women had relief within just one minute
- 98% had relief in one hour
- 87% had relief for up to 12 hours.

Additionally, 81% of users were symptom free on day seven after five daily applications.

- ✓ Hormone- and irritant-free
- ✓ Hyaluronic acid, aloe vera, vitamin E and vitamin A
- ✓ Gentle enough for daily use
- ✓ Water-based
- ✓ pH-balanced



Balance Activ or Hervitality Moisture Plus Pessaries

- ✓ Provides effective and soothing relief from vaginal dryness and atrophy, and the associated discomfort¹⁶
- ✓ Supplements moisture levels and restores vaginal elasticity

- Intensive vaginal moisturiser
- Hormone-free
- Suitable for regular use
- Hyaluronic acid, aloe vera, vitamin E and vitamin A
- Promotes regeneration of the mucosa in the vagina after childbirth or intimate surgery.¹⁶



Who is more likely to suffer from intimate health conditions?

BV - Women who:^{3,4}

- Are sexually active
- Have had a change of partner
- Smoke
- Use a copper intrauterine device for contraception

Thrush - Women who:^{7,9,10}

- Experience hormonal changes, e.g. taking oral contraception, using hormone replacement therapy (HRT), during pregnancy or menopause
- Recently used antibiotics
- Have poorly controlled diabetes
- Have a weakened immune system

Vaginal dryness - Women who:^{14,15}

- Experience hormonal changes, e.g. due to:
 - Pregnancy
 - Breastfeeding
 - Menopause
 - Certain medicines, e.g. hormonal contraceptives, antidepressants or antihistamines
 - A hysterectomy, especially if ovaries were removed too
 - Cancer treatments, e.g. chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hormonal therapy or surgery
- Have an underlying condition, e.g. diabetes
- Are not aroused during sex

Douches, vaginal washes, deodorants or other perfumed products in or around the vagina can disturb the vaginal pH and microbiome balance. Their use can make BV, thrush and vaginal dryness more likely.^{3,7,15}

Instead, customers can use these specially formulated intimate products:

Balance Activ Intimate Daily Foam Wash and Wipes

- Offer a gentle cleanse whilst soothing and maintaining the vaginal pH balance
- Gynecologically and dermatologically tested



Balance Activ Intimate Soothing Cream

- Quickly soothes irritation, itching and redness associated with intimate dry skin
- Anti-itch extract avenanthramide, skin calming jojoba oil and moisturising vitamin E
- For dry/irritated skin, apply 3-4 times per day until irritation and discomfort stops
- For daily use, apply daily after washing or showering to help protect the skin's natural barrier and maintain moisturised skin
- Dermatologically tested
- For external use only



Additional advice

Promoting self-care

- To relieve BV symptoms and prevent the infection from recurring, advise swapping baths for showers or avoid prolonged exposure to bath products which may disrupt vaginal pH and microbiota balance, and use a milder detergent to wash underwear.^{3,4}
- Advise those with BV that recurs around the time of their period to use Balance Activ BV Treatments for a couple of days to help maintain the body's natural balance. In addition, one pessary every third day for three months or one pessary a day for four to five days at the end of a course of antibiotics can also help to maintain the natural vaginal pH.
- To ease thrush and stop it from recurring, advise proper drying after washing, choosing cotton underwear instead of tight underwear or tights, and using only water-based lubricants.⁹

Supporting those with post-menopausal symptoms

- Hervitality Menopause Cooling Mist can help beat menopausal heat in an instant. It is clinically proven to cool skin in one application,[†] leaving it soothed, hydrated and feeling fresh.

[†] Test in vivo on 20 healthy women aged over 50 years in menopause

Have a confident conversation

Apply the following tips to get the most from your conversations with customers:

- Create a safe and approachable environment, have a place away from other customers where you can talk confidentially
- Start with open, non-judgemental questions to help put women at ease
- Show empathy, use everyday language and maintain a calm and reassuring tone
- Normalise how common these conditions are to help reduce feelings of stigma
- If the customer is uncomfortable speaking about their symptoms, direct them to [balanceactiv.com](https://www.balanceactiv.com) and ask them to complete the Symptom Checker. They can share the result with you to enable you to provide corresponding treatment
- When a customer wants to buy a product for thrush, check for confirmation that they have thrush, not BV, which is more common. If they don't want to discuss their symptoms, direct them to the [balanceactiv.com](https://www.balanceactiv.com) Symptom Checker for confirmation of the condition.



Scan here to complete your learning assessment

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