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## RafflesHospital

### More than Skin Deep Vaginal Discharge

Consulting a dermatologist for unusual vaginal discharge? "This may not be the intuitive response for many women. Most people may not be aware that dermatologists are not only trained to diagnose and treat skin, hair and nail disorders, but also to investigate and treat unusual vaginal discharges



and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)," shares Dr Hameet Ranu Eriksson, Specialist in Dermatology & Consultant, Raffles Skin Centre.

Adds Dr Hameet, "The field of Dermatology includes **Venereology**, which is a branch of medicine dealing with STDs. This makes sense as many patients with STDs present with complaints that are related to growths in and around the genital skin."

One of the most common scenarios a dermatologist encounters on a daily basis is vaginal discharge that causes discomfort, itching and skin rash on and around the genital area.

**Vaginal Discharge**  
Vaginal discharge is a clear or whitish fluid that is produced in the uterus, cervix or vagina. It is a normal way for your body to discard fluid and old cells. The natural balance of the vagina can be disrupted by anything that interferes with its normal environment.

Patients may present with a main complaint of a skin rash or irritation in the vaginal area, which may also be accompanied by unusual vaginal discharge.

Although many cases of unusual vaginal discharge are not caused by sexually transmitted infections (STIs), they still require treatment. Examples of such conditions are vaginal yeast infections and bacterial vaginosis.

It is not uncommon that the vaginal discharge may lead to irritation resulting in a rash of the genital skin. This may be alarming for the patient and lead to undue anxiety and concern. It is important for women to know that a number of conditions may cause changes in the appearance of their vaginal discharge which among others include: menstrual cycle, emotional stress, pregnancy, hormone pills (e.g. oral contraceptives), breastfeeding, ovulation and diet. Douches, feminine hygiene products, soaps and antibiotics can also upset the pH balance of the vagina and lead to vaginal infections.

**Signs of Infection**  
A vaginal discharge might be a sign of infection if it causes itch, swelling, bad odour, is green, yellow or grey in color, or looks foamy or like cottage cheese.

Yeast infection is caused by an overgrowth of fungus in the vaginal canal and it is not a sexually transmitted infection. It presents with thick, white cottage cheese-like discharge and can be treated with antifungal vaginal pessaries or tablets.

Bacterial vaginosis, like yeast infection, presents with white discharge that has a characteristic fishy smell and can be eradicated by antibiotics.

**Trichomoniasis** is an STI that presents with vaginal discharge that is green, yellow or

grey in color. It is usually frothy and can be eradicated by a short course of antibiotics.

**Gonorrhoea** and **Chlamydia** are STIs that present with cloudy profuse discharge but often with no symptoms. If left untreated, the infection may spread and cause pelvic inflammatory disease, with pelvic pain which over a prolonged period of time may lead to infertility.

**Treatment**  
The dermatologist will conduct a thorough examination with a speculum and take swab samples of the discharge and look for external and internal growths e.g. ulcers, warts, polyps etc. Vaginal pH testing is a quick, cheap and simple test that can also be done to identify the source of the infection.

Once the infection is identified, treatment with antibiotics or antifungals should clear the infection within a week. Women should avoid having sex until they have been treated and encourage their sexual partner to be treated simultaneously or re-infection could occur.

If you are a woman and experiencing unusual vaginal discharge or suspect that you have contracted an infection, consult our female dermatologist at Raffles Skin Centre and seek treatment early. RH

For more information or to make an appointment, call **6311 2055** or email [skincentre@rafflesmedical.com](mailto:skincentre@rafflesmedical.com)