

Just married Saumya Vashishth, 25, returned from her dream honeymoon with beautiful memories, but also an inexplicable, and unrelenting pain. It worsened every time she went to pee. When it didn't seem to get any better, she

Why V care?



SHILPI SINGH clears all your doubts on intimate care

went to see a gynaec only to be told that she had contracted Honeymoon Cystitis, an infection in the urinary tract. Her gynaec told her that several women who go through this trauma on their first indulgence with a male partner, and it can be prevented with adequate vaginal care and treated well in time to control its severity.

Intimate importance

Vaginal health is an integral part of a woman's total well-being, and she needs to take adequate care to avoid a situation like Vashishth. Often women tend to ignore or suffer in silence which tends to add to their medical woes. Explaining the different types of vaginal infections, Dr Vandana Punjabi, Dermatologist, Nanavati Super Speciality Hospital, Mumbai, says, "The vaginal infections (vaginitis) may be bacterial, fungal or viral infections, or maybe due to dermatological conditions. Very often, the skin around the entrance to the vagina (vulva) can also become irritated. Occasionally, problems which are neglected for several years can transform into cancers. Ongoing vaginal health issues can cause stress or relationship problems and impact one's self-confidence."

Prevention is always better than cure. A woman needs to maintain proper hygiene routine in her day-to-day life. An unhealthy vagina makes the women vulnerable to vaginal



infections. "Vaginal health is an important aspect in maintaining a woman's overall health and can be affected by medications, diet, clothing, exercise and even increased stress. Hygiene needs to be acknowledged as a major health concern which needs to be addressed immediately," adds Dr Archana Dhawan Bajaj, Gynaecologist, Obstetrician & IVF Expert, Nurture IVF Centre, New Delhi.

Back to basics

A healthy vagina is more acidic, which helps maintain an environment of good bacteria called lactobacilli and normal vaginal secretions. This good bacteria helps fight off bad microorganisms and maintains a normal vaginal pH of 4.5 or less. A woman's pH balance can be disrupted by many different things that

normally occur in life including douches, soaps, antibiotics, hormone level changes, vaginal intercourse, pregnancy and breastfeeding. "Vaginal health is affected when the pH gets too high; it can cause an overgrowth of bacteria, which causes an odour (usually a fishy smell), watery grey discharge and vaginal irritation. It is known as bacterial vaginosis. A vaginal yeast infection does not have a high pH, but can be caused by antibiotic use, stress, excessive moisture, excessive sugar intake and diabetes. Symptoms include vaginal irritation, itching and a non-odorous thick white clumpy discharge," explains Dr Dhawan.

Besides infective vaginitis, non-infectious vaginitis is when the skin around the vagina becomes sensitive to an irritant such as scented tampons, perfumed soaps, bubble baths, fabric softeners or condom allergy "It is not an infection, and the solution is to avoid whatever you are reacting to," advises Dr Punjabi.

Right care

There are several things women can do on their own to help maintain good vaginal health which includes basic hygiene routine like changing tampons and pads frequently, wearing loose-fitting, breathable cotton undergarments, and avoiding tight-fitting clothing, span-

dex or bathing suits for a prolonged period. A lot on keeping the pH balance of the area intact. "Clean the area with lukewarm water only to avoid disrupting your natural pH, avoid soaps (bars or liquid) to clean this delicate area as these can upset the pH balance and lead to leading to infection, irritation, and even bad smells. Avoid scented creams, perfumes, scented wipes, scented pads and tampons in this area," advises Dr Punjabi. One must also avoid douching, which will remove the good bacteria and change the vaginal pH, avoid vaginal deodorant spray or strong feminine intimate washes that could irritate the delicate mucosal lining of the vulva and use a good probiotic daily to help replace good bacteria in the body. "Vaginal care is critical before and after intercourse. It is advisable to take precaution like condoms for both male and female. After intercourse, cleaning is necessary. It is recommended that washing and wiping are done from front to back: that is, wash or wipe the urethra, vagina and anus in that order. Urinating after sexual intercourse is also recommended," says Dr Dhawan. If there is persistent itching for more than a week or if it turns into inflammation with a smelly discharge, see a doctor immediately to avoid any complication.

