Vaginal yeast infections are usually caused by a yeast known as *candida albicans*, part of the family of one-cell fungus that is normally present in the vagina, mouth, digestive tract, and on the skin.

If the body is stressed, candida can change from its harmless one-cell form into a long microscopic tube (hypha), which puts out branches (mycelia) that penetrate into cell walls and cause infection in various parts of the body.

The female body has its own defences against invading yeast cells. The healthy vagina is slightly acidic, thus discouraging infections. Friendly bacteria called lactobacillus acidophilus also help keep the vagina acidic and resistant to infections.

"In children, chronic yeast infection can present itself as hyperactivity or learning disabilities."

The use of the birth control pill and prolonged or repeated use of antibiotics or steroids can predispose to yeast infections. Also, sometimes the first sign of diabetes is a stubborn vaginal yeast infection that won’t go away or keeps coming back. Stress, fatigue, overwork, lack of sleep, and a poor diet high in sugars and refined foods can make us more vulnerable to yeast infections. Anemia, low levels of thyroid hormones, and other diseases or infections present in our body can do the same thing.

Symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection
The main symptoms of a vaginal yeast infection usually are vaginal discharge
and itching. The discharge is often white and varies in quantity from a little to a lot, from being thin and mucousy to being thick, curdy, and cottage cheese-like. The amount of itching varies but can be severe enough to interfere with sleep. Some women notice an odour suggestive of bread dough or the fermenting yeast smell of beer being brewed.

**Home remedies**

Boric acid is an effective, inexpensive treatment for yeast infections. Fill 00-size gelatin capsules with boric acid and insert them high into the vagina once or twice a day for seven days. Alternatively, douche with two tablespoons of boric acid to one quart of lukewarm water daily for a week.

Another old remedy uses a whole clove of garlic. The garlic is peeled without nicking and then wrapped in gauze to make a kind of tampon with a gauze tail. The whole thing may be dipped in vegetable oil to make insertion into the vagina easier. Leave the garlic suppository in place for 12 hours and then douche with a diluted vinegar solution. This treatment usually lasts for three days.

**Chronic generalized yeast infections**

Dr. C. Orian Truss, author of *The Missing Diagnosis*, has 20 years of clinical experience with more than 3,000 candida patients. He is convinced that yeast is implicated in a wide variety of human ills, from depression and hormonal disturbances to allergic reactions and autoimmune diseases.

One of the most important questions he asks is, “When did you last feel well?” Truss then tries to figure out if the onset of symptoms coincide with the use of antibiotics, birth control pills, steroids, other drugs or medical procedures, and/or repeated pregnancies.

Symptoms of chronic yeast infections include:
- Fatigue
- Depression, anxiety, and other mental or emotional illnesses
- Digestive difficulties, including indigestion, bloating, gas, and diarrhea, alternating with constipation
- Menstrual problems, including premenstrual syndrome
- Discomfort during sex or infertility
- Arthritis
- Chronic skin problems
- Repeated urinary or vaginal infections
- Asthma or other respiratory illnesses
- Allergic reactions or chemical sensitivities

In children, chronic yeast infection can present itself as hyperactivity or learning disabilities. In adolescents, candida can cause depression and severe mood swings. A typical story is a top student who suddenly becomes unable to think clearly or learn, and who becomes suicidally depressed.
Treating chronic yeast infections

Probiotics, such as high-quality lactobacillus acidophilus (one-quarter teaspoon powder or two capsules), should be taken by mouth twice a day with meals for six months to a year.

Soil-based organisms provide a powerful and effective alternative to acidophilus. More stable than acidophilus, soil-based organisms need not be refrigerated. They help balance pH in the body and have an immune-balancing effect.

It may be necessary to help cleanse the colon to get rid of the yeast. If you are constipated, you should take an herbal laxative tea and psyllium-seed powder first thing in the morning and last thing at night.

Natural anti-yeast preparations, including caprylic acid (made from coconut oil), mycopicin (made from the castor bean oil), and garlic, fresh or in capsule form, have a strong anti-yeast effect. Various preparations of deodorized garlic can also be used.

Extra-virgin coconut oil contains large amounts of lauric, capric, and caprylic acid, all of which are powerful agents against candida. Take one tablespoon daily.
Treating chronic yeast infections
Diet is the most important contributing factor and must be changed in order to begin treatment. Diet must be individualized but, in general, the main foods to avoid are sugars, bread with yeast, dairy, fermented foods, dried fruits, and canned, processed, and moldy foods, especially overripe fruits. Other treatments are listed in the accompanying chart.

Carolyn DeMarco, MD, is a physician with a long-time interest in women’s health and natural medicine. Her work can be viewed at demarcomd.com.

Concentrated grapefruit-seed extract is effective against both yeast and parasites. The dose is five to 20 drops, three or four times a day.

Wild oregano oil or super strength oregano oil is also very effective against candida. Pure oregano oil can also be applied to the soles of the feet morning and night, three drops for each foot. Oregano applied on other areas of the body needs to be diluted with extra virgin olive oil.

Some forms of colloidal silver are also helpful in combating candida. Take one-half teaspoon twice a day.

Another interesting development appears to be with silver hydrosols. For vaginal infections, take one part silver hydrosol and two parts distilled water and place in vagina for 10 minutes. Repeat twice a day. For intestinal candida, swallow one tablespoon silver hydrosol along with one tablespoon aloe three times a day on an empty stomach. Use a probiotic at bedtime.

Also very helpful are anticandida kits, which combine bowel cleansing and anticandida products available at your health food store.