

Cervicitis

What is cervicitis?

Cervicitis is inflammation (swelling and irritation) of the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. Babies grow in the uterus, and menstrual blood comes from the uterus, through the cervix.

What is the cause?

Infection by bacteria or a virus is a common cause. Usually you get the infection from sexual contact. Examples of sexually transmitted infections (STIs, or STDs) are trichomonas, chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes, and human papillomavirus (HPV). An overgrowth of bacteria normally found in the vagina can also cause cervicitis (a condition called bacterial vaginosis or nonspecific vaginitis).

Other possible causes of cervicitis are allergies to spermicide or latex condoms.

What are the symptoms?

Often there are no symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- A vaginal discharge with an odor or a gray or yellow color
- Discomfort or pain in the lower belly, especially during sex
- Bleeding or spotting after sex
- Bleeding or spotting between menstrual periods
- Itching, burning, or pain when you urinate

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you, including a pelvic exam. Tests may include:

- Tests of a sample of discharge and cells from your cervix
- A Pap test, which is a screening test done during a pelvic exam to check for abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix or vagina
- Blood tests

How is it treated?

Cervicitis caused by bacteria may be treated with antibiotics. Cervicitis caused by a virus may be treated with antiviral medicine. If a sexually transmitted disease caused the infection, your partner must also be treated. Treatment is important to help prevent the spread of the infection to other parts of your body and to your sex partner.

Mild cervicitis usually is gone by the time you have taken all of the medicine. Sometimes it may take a month or two to heal.

Rarely, the infection may spread to the lining of the uterus or to the fallopian tubes. If it does spread, the infection could cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which is an infection of the female reproductive organs. The infection may make it hard for you to get pregnant.

If medicine does not cure the cervicitis, your healthcare provider may recommend a procedure that can treat the infection by freezing and destroying the tissue in and around the infection.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions and take all of your medicine as prescribed. Cervicitis can become a more severe, long-term problem if it is not treated long enough to heal completely.
- Keep your genital area clean. Do not douche unless your provider says you should.
- Use sanitary pads instead of tampons.
- Don't use a diaphragm for birth control.
- Make sure you tell your sexual partner(s) about your infection. They need to be treated.
- Ask your healthcare provider:
 - How and when you will hear your test results
 - How long it will take to recover
 - What activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
 - When it is safe to start having sex again
 - How to take care of yourself at home
 - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent cervicitis?

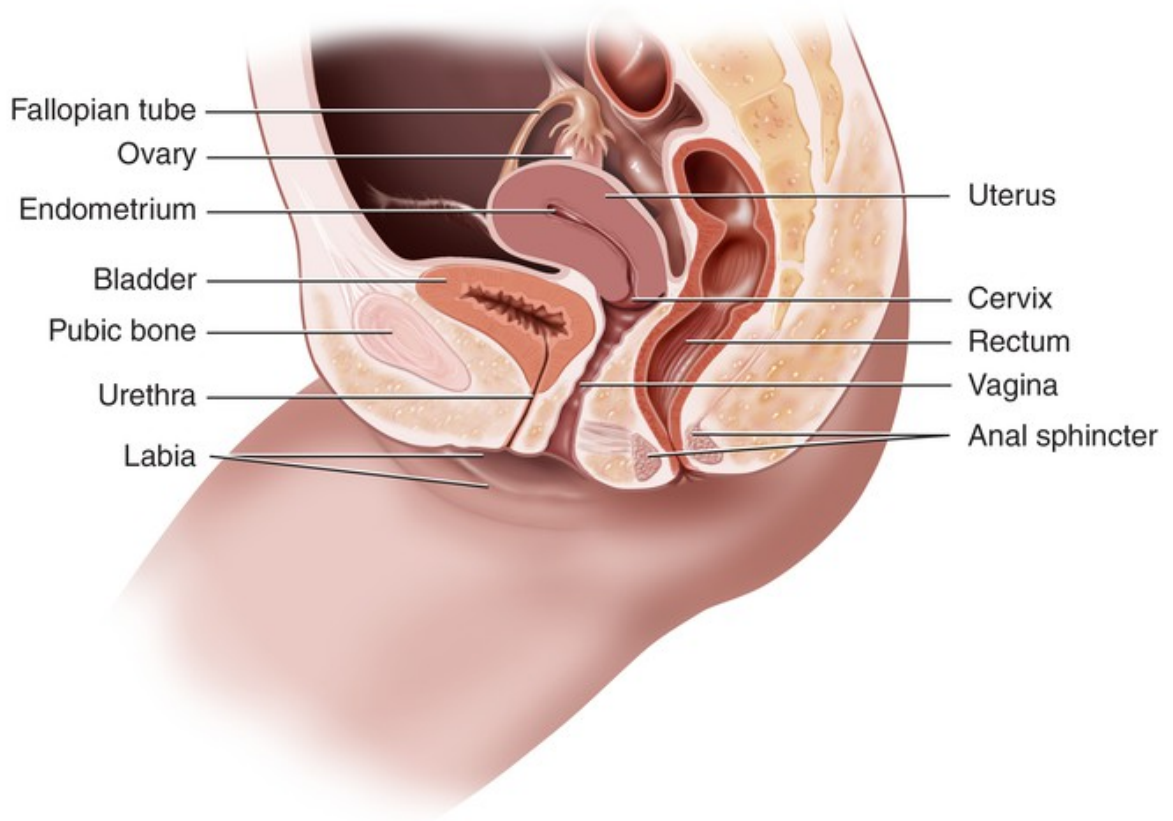
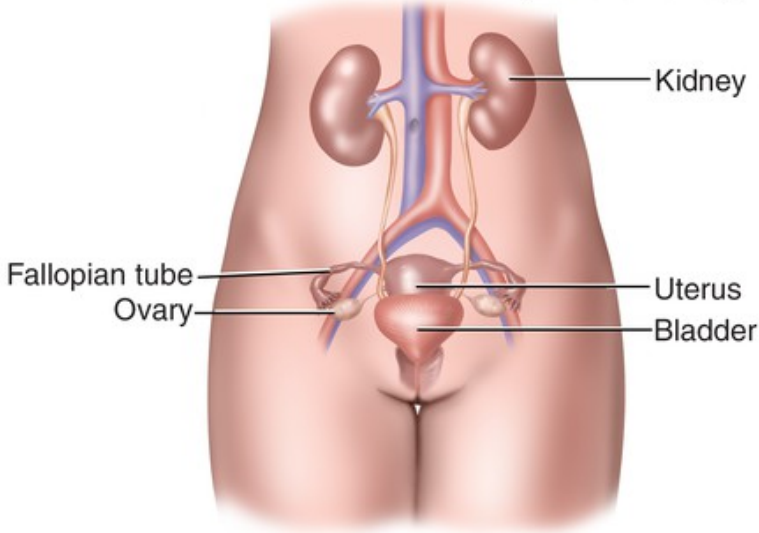
- Use latex or polyurethane condoms during foreplay and every time you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- Have just 1 sexual partner who is not having sex with anyone else.
- If you have had sex and are worried that you may have been infected, see your healthcare provider even if you don't have any symptoms.
- If you have been sexually assaulted, you may need to be treated to prevent sexually transmitted infections. You should have an exam within a few hours of the assault (and before showering or bathing) even if you don't want to press charges. You can also ask about being protected from pregnancy when you have the exam.

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Female Pelvis

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