

Why that Candida infection keeps coming back

By Victoria Bugembe Nampala

Genital candidiasis, commonly known as a yeast infection, is a common fungal infection that affects the vagina and vulva. Although many women experience it at some point in their lives, for some it keeps recurring and becomes a constant source of discomfort, frustration, and embarrassment.

The condition is characterised by intense itching, a burning sensation, soreness, irritation, and a thick white discharge. Some women also experience pain during urination or sexual intercourse, particularly when the infection becomes severe.

Because the symptoms often return after treatment, many women assume the medicine "did not work." However, health experts say



Candidiasis can be a recipe of stress

recurrence is usually linked to lifestyle, underlying health conditions, or repeated disruption of the vagina's natural balance.

Agnes Kiyangi, a skin specialist at Skin Specialist Clinic, says candidiasis is not considered a sexually transmitted infection, although sexual activity can sometimes trigger irritation or reintroduce the fungus.

"Once a woman gets candida, there is about a 50% chance it can return, especially if the underlying causes are not addressed," she explains.

Doctors note that many women unknowingly create conditions that encourage the fungus to thrive. Practices such as frequent vaginal washing, douching, or inserting soaps and herbal substances into the vagina may temporarily create a feeling of cleanliness, but they can actually destroy the protective bacteria that keep yeast growth under control.

Dr. Edward Ogwang, a dermatologist at The Skin Specialist Clinic, says the infection is less common in men. However,



Men, too, can suffer from candidiasis

approximately 15% of uncircumcised men may develop it, mainly after unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner.

In men, candidiasis may present as itching on the foreskin or head of the penis, redness, small cracks, or soreness.

Candidiasis develops when the natural balance inside the vagina is disrupted. Under normal conditions, healthy bacteria maintain an acidic environment that limits the growth of Candida fungus. However, when immunity drops or these bacteria are destroyed, the fungus multiplies rapidly, leading to infection.

Several factors increase the risk of recurrent infections. These include prolonged use of broad-spectrum antibiotics, wearing tight underwear or trousers that trap heat and moisture, and poor blood sugar control in people with diabetes.

Health experts also warn that recurrent candidiasis can sometimes be an early sign

of an underlying health problem. Women with HIV/AIDS, uncontrolled diabetes, malnutrition, or weakened immunity are more likely to experience repeated infections.

Pregnancy can also increase susceptibility because hormonal changes alter the vaginal environment. Similarly, some hormonal contraceptives containing progesterone may contribute by affecting oestrogen levels, which help maintain normal vaginal balance. Diet and lifestyle may also play a role. According to specialists, excessive consumption of sugary foods and highly processed junk food may worsen yeast overgrowth in some women, particularly those already prone to infection.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

Candidiasis is commonly treated using antifungal creams applied to the vulva or pessaries inserted into the vagina. In more persistent cases, oral antifungal medication may be prescribed. However, treatment alone is often not sufficient if the habits that trigger the infection continue.

Kiyangi advises women to avoid interfering with the vagina's natural cleaning system.

"The vagina is self-cleaning. Focus on washing the outer part — the vulva — and avoid inserting substances," she says.

Kiyangi also encourages women who experience repeated infections to discuss family planning options with their health workers, including non-hormonal methods such as condoms or intrauterine devices.