

# Ivy Grove Surgery

## Minor Illness Leaflet #9 – Bacterial Vaginosis

Dear

We have provided this leaflet following your recent consultation on . The NHS aims to empower all patients to self-care and we hope that this leaflet will help you to manage your condition in the future.

### **Name of condition**

Bacterial Vaginosis.

### **What it is**

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a very common condition caused by an overgrowth of normal germs (bacteria) in the vagina. This causes a change in the normal vaginal discharge. Approximately 1 in 3 women have BV at some time in their lives.

BV is not caused by poor hygiene. In fact, excessive washing of the vagina may alter the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina, which may make BV more likely to develop or worsen.

We don't really know what triggers the bacterial balance to 'swing' away from normal.

### **You are more likely to get BV**

- If you are sexually active, however women who have never had sex can get BV too.
- If you have recently changed your sexual partner.
- If you have a past history of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- If you smoke.
- If you have a copper coil for contraception.
- If you use bubble bath, strong soaps or perfumed deodorants
- If you have prolonged or heavy periods.
- Following hormonal changes such as during puberty, pregnancy or the menopause.
- Following courses of antibiotics.

BV can be distressing and sometimes make women feel unclean. BV is not a sexually transmitted disease (STD). You cannot 'catch' BV from intercourse with a man and men cannot get BV.

If you have untreated BV during pregnancy, you have a slightly increased risk of developing some complications. If you develop BV in pregnancy you will usually be offered treatment.

Your doctor or nurse may be happy to diagnose BV just by its typical symptoms without the need for an examination or test. If you prefer a test you can buy a kit from a pharmacy to test yourself at home.

Occasionally your doctor or nurse may suggest that a sample (a swab) of your discharge be taken from your vagina and sent to the laboratory for testing if the diagnosis is unclear or if your symptoms haven't settled with treatment.

BV often returns after it has been treated. No good way has been found yet of preventing this from happening. If you get recurrent episodes of BV then your Doctor may recommend using metronidazole gel twice a week for up to six months.

# Ivy Grove Surgery

## Symptoms to expect

- Usually no pain, itching or bleeding
- Discharge which can smell stronger than usual
- Sometimes it smells 'fishy' and it can be watery and greyish in colour.

## Treatment

The body is often very good at getting back its own balance. The disruption in the balance of vaginal germs (bacteria) that causes BV may correct naturally, with time. So, if you have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, you may not need any treatment.

If however BV is causing symptoms, if you are pregnant, trying to become pregnant or about to have a gynaecological procedure then you may be advised to get treatment for BV.

Oral antibiotics are the first-choice treatment. A full course of metronidazole tablets is the common treatment. This clears BV in most cases. It is important not to drink alcohol whilst taking these antibiotics as this can cause severe vomiting.

A cream or gel placed inside the vagina can be used if you prefer this type of treatment, or if you experience unpleasant side-effects with metronidazole tablets. These treatments are believed to be almost as effective as antibiotics by mouth and can be purchased over the counter at most pharmacies without the need for a prescription.

Vaginal creams and gels can weaken latex condoms and diaphragms. Therefore, during treatment and for five days after treatment do not rely on condoms or diaphragms to protect against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

After treatment, you do not need any further tests to ensure that BV has cleared provided that your symptoms have gone.