

Vaginal health

What is the vaginal microbiome?

Your vaginal microbiome is a community of microorganisms—mostly *Lactobacillus* species—that protect against infections, regulate vaginal pH, and support tissue health. A balanced microbiome is your body's natural defense system.

What can disrupt balance?

Disruptions in the microbiome can lead to conditions like bacterial vaginosis (BV), yeast infections, and urinary tract infections (UTIs).

Common disruptors include:

- Stress and sleep disturbance
- Harsh hygiene practices (douching, perfumed soaps)
- High-sugar diets
- Antibiotic use
- Hormonal changes (menopause, pregnancy)

Functional testing

Testing helps identify root causes of symptoms like discharge, itching, or burning.

Recommended tests for deeper insights include:

- **Comprehensive hormone profile:** Evaluates estrogen levels, which influence vaginal pH and immune response
- **Vaginal microbiome test:** Analyzes beneficial vs. harmful microbes

Ask your healthcare provider if these tests are right for you.

Key nutrients to support vaginal health

Nutrient/supplement	Role in vaginal health	Where it's found
Probiotics (<i>Lactobacillus</i> spp.)	Replenish good bacteria, lower pH	Fermented foods
Vitamin C (vaginal)	Reduces BV recurrence, balances pH	Vaginal suppository
Boric acid	Antifungal, antibacterial	Vaginal suppository
Vitamin E	Relieves dryness and atrophy	Vaginal suppository
Estriol (menopausal support)	Restores pH, increases <i>Lactobacillus</i>	Prescription cream (US only)

Lifestyle tips for a healthy vaginal microbiome



Nutrition

- Eat more fiber-rich foods like veggies, beans, and whole grains.
- Limit sugar and processed carbs.
- Avoid excess saturated fat.
- Include micronutrients like folate, calcium, and vitamins A, C, and E.



Stress management

- Chronic stress disrupts immune function and the vaginal barrier.
- Practice meditation, deep breathing, and mindfulness.
- Sleep 7–9 hours per night to support hormonal balance.



Hygiene

- Avoid douching or vaginal steaming.
- Use only mild, unscented soap externally.
- Change pads and tampons regularly.
- Wear breathable cotton underwear.
- Avoid tight clothing that traps moisture.



Life stage considerations



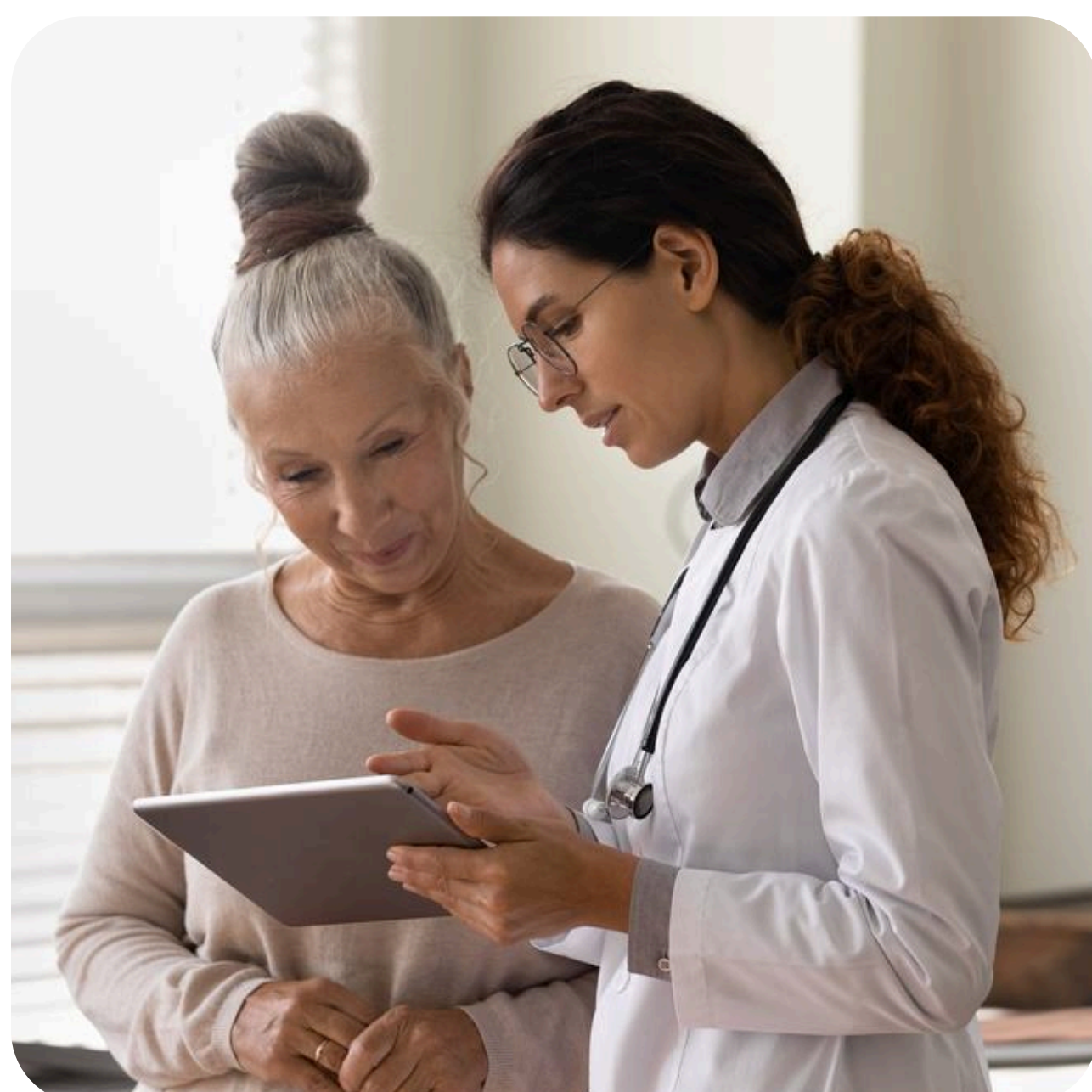
Cycling individuals

- Use probiotics before/after antibiotics or during times of stress.
- Track symptoms around menstruation, which may affect microbiome shifts.



Pregnant or lactating individuals

- Probiotic blends are generally safe in late pregnancy.
- Good nutrition improves maternal and fetal health outcomes.
- Avoid intravaginal boric acid or estriol unless guided by a provider.



Menopausal individuals

- Lower estrogen can reduce *Lactobacillus* and increase vaginal pH.
- Vaginal estriol and vitamin E may support tissue health and microbiome balance.

References

1. Sasani, E., Rafat, Z., Ashrafi, K., Salimi, Y., Zandi, M., Soltani, S., Hashemi, F., & Hashemi, S. J. (2021). Vulvovaginal candidiasis in Iran: A systematic review and meta-analysis on the epidemiology, clinical manifestations, demographic characteristics, risk factors, etiologic agents and laboratory diagnosis. *Microbial Pathogenesis*, 154, 104802. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.micpath.2021.104802>
2. Wilson, J. D., Lee, R. A., Balen, A. H., & Rutherford, A. J. (2007). Bacterial vaginal flora in relation to changing oestrogen levels. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 18(5), 308–311. <https://doi.org/10.1258/095646207780749583>

