

Candidiasis

Candida albicans is one of many candida fungi, or yeast that exists in our intestinal tract; in women it is also found in the vagina. It resides quite peaceably in the intestines and the genital area unless there is a disturbance in the environment that allows candida to grow out of control. When candida does proliferate, yeast infections occur and manifest in many areas of the body. It can affect men as well as women, but women are four times more likely to suffer candida overgrowth.

Candida organisms can provide hormone-like substances that mimic human hormones. Also, some types of candida have receptors for hormones on their surface. Most people with candida overgrowth have some serious nutritional deficiencies, most likely because the gut is damaged, promoting malabsorption of our nutrients. The immune system may also be producing antibodies against the candida, promoting an allergy response to this organism that is inherent to the body and normally not harmful.

Conventional medicine acknowledges that here is a harmless, irritating level of yeast problems such as thrush or vaginal yeast infections, as well as life-threatening Candida septicemia in people with compromised immune systems, but conventional practitioners are reluctant to view allergies. Chronic fatigue syndrome, bowel problems, and other conditions as related to candida yeast.

Symptoms

Over 50 symptoms have been identified as indicators of candida in the body, including chemical sensitivities, allergy, asthma, mood swings, fatigue, headaches and migraines, muscle pain, rectal itching, irritability, dizziness, depression, insomnia, and lack of concentration. Candida has been associated with low stomach acid, so intestinal disorders including diarrhea, constipation, cramps, and foul-smelling stools, breath, and urine are very common. The symptoms are so similar to other illnesses that diagnosis can be missed. Chronic candida can also be a symptom of other illnesses such as chronic fatigue syndrome and HIV. Vaginal yeast infections are apparent by the presence of white cheesy discharge with a distinct odor, itching, and irritation and it can be painful to urinate. Men also experience genital candida as a UTI or an itching or burning sensation at the head of the penis. Dark circles under the eyes, a thick white coating on the tongue, and fungal infections around the nails are also signs of candida overgrowth.

Causes

Yeast becomes invasive in the body when there is not enough "good" intestinal flora to keep it in balance. Antibiotics are the most well-known culprits for killing the "good guys" in the gut and allowing a hospitable environment for candida. Birth control pills, steroids, and chemotherapy can also contribute to candida overgrowth. Food allergies, alcohol, dairy products or diets low in fiber and high in sugar and refined carbohydrates that are a smorgasbord for candida. Other triggers can be smoking, stress, multiple pregnancies, and a weakened immune system. Serious illness, such as HIV, increases vulnerability to systemic candidiasis, where candida can proliferate anywhere in the body. If it reaches the bloodstream, it can act as a poison resulting in Candida septicemia.

Systemic Candida infection can follow an untreated local one, but it is important to know that systemic yeast infection can exist without any visible local symptoms. When present, symptoms can be varied.

Yeast can harm the body in at least three ways:

1. Local infection, such as thrush, esophagitis, cystitis and vaginitis.
2. Blood-borne infection resulting when the fungus burrows into the intestinal lining, causing inflammation and micro vascular damage with the release of toxins directly into the blood and lymphatic systems. This causes further immune suppression in people with seriously depressed immunity as a result of conditions like AIDS or cancer.
3. Intestinal yeast infection, where direct damage to the intestinal lining increases intestinal permeability with subsequent absorption of Candida toxins and partially digested food, which can trigger food sensitivities.

Additional local damage is done by the immune suppression caused by these toxins and possibly by the body's allergic reaction to them. Traditional medical doctors do not generally recognize this last manifestation of candidiasis.

Diagnosis

It is generally agreed that diagnosis of candidiasis is best made on the basis of a thorough patient history. A good questionnaire can be helpful toward the end. Doctors may wish to confirm their diagnosis of candidiasis through the use of specialized laboratory tests, such as stool cultures for Candida and measurement of antibody levels to Candida or Candida antigens in the blood.

Standard Medical Treatment

Traditional medicine employs fungicides (like Nystatin, Diflucan and Nizoral) to treat severe yeast infections. Fungistatic drugs inhibit the growth of fungi, preventing it from getting worse, may be employed as well. While these may effectively suppress fungal growth, it may resume once medication is discontinued unless the primary problem is handled and dysbiosis corrected.

While many doctors of "complementary" medicine will rely upon herbal and nutritional remedies solely, some may opt to do a short course of drug (anti-fungal) therapy first in an effort to shorten treatment time. Diflucan, Sporanox and Nizoral are all absorbed in the upper GI tract and taken into circulation, so therapeutic doses do not reach the colon. Nystatin can be used in conjunction with the systemic drugs for short period of time to help ensure elimination of Candida, but understand that handling Candida is more than just taking a pill. It is a holistic approach, consisting of diet, supplementation, and lifestyle modification, mental and emotional support.

Health Tips to Enhance Healing

- The best prevention and offense against candida is to boost the immune system. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, 7 to 10 half-cup servings daily. Legumes, fish, whole grains, nuts and seeds, and their oils will provide your body with balanced nutrition. Avoid eating simple carbohydrates such as white bread, cake, cookies, and chips, and too many citrus fruits, which allow candida to flourish. (See Candida Cleanse Handout)
- If candida is a recurring problem, switch to a diet that excludes all yeast and sugar. Any food that has been aged should be eliminated, so no cheese, soy, sauce, pickles, raw mushrooms, vinegar, or alcohol, to name a few. Avoid gluten and eat millet, quinoa, and brown rice instead.

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By Cobi Slater, DNM, CHT

- If you are not lactose intolerant, eat plenty of plain yogurt to increase the good bacteria population in your intestines. Half a cup to one cup every day will ward off yeast infections and restore balance to the body. If you are taking antibiotics, it is especially important, but if you do not like the taste of yogurt, you can always supplement with probiotics.

- Do not eat animal or dairy products that have been injected with antibiotics. Dairy also has a high level of milk sugar.

Drink at least eight to ten glasses of pure, filtered water daily. For every juice, caffeinated, or alcoholic beverage you consume, have another glass of water.

- Do not overeat; it suppresses the immune system.

- Stop smoking

- Take one or two digestive enzymes before every meal. Do not drink while eating or else you will dilute your enzymes.

Other Recommendations

- Wear loose white cotton underwear instead of synthetic and leave the pantyhose in the drawer. Change undergarments daily, and wash them in high temperatures.

- After going to the toilet, wipe from front to back to avoid spreading the fungus back to the vagina.

- Take baths instead of showers to ensure that the genital area is washed thoroughly. Make sure that you dry off well.

- Reduce your exposure to chemicals, perfumes, dyes, fragrances, and scents. When fighting an infection, don't use bubble bath, douches, perfumed toilet paper, deodorized tampons, etc. Soap should be natural as well.

Mercury toxicity can make the body vulnerable to yeast overgrowth. Have a hair, urine, and blood analysis done to determine if that is a factor. If so, avoid exposure to mercury and have dental amalgams removed.

Supplements

A natural anti-fungal program would be essential during the first month. A product that combines a broad spectrum of natural anti-fungal can be effective since there are many different strains of yeast. Capsules and a liquid tincture in the morning and before bed can fit into anyone's schedule.

The following anti-fungals can be used:

- Uva ursi- shown in Germany to be effective in eliminating Candida.

- Calcium undecylate (From the castor bean) shown to be six times more effective than caprylic acid in killing yeast.

- Neem leaf- contains strong antibiotic alkaloids and tannins.

- Olive leaf- a traditional anti-fungal.

- Berberine sulphate- a concentrated anti-fungal, antibacterial compound found in barberry.

- Oregon grape root- contains berberine, a strong antibacterial and anti-fungal.

- Oregano leaf- contains the alkaloid carvacrol and thymol, both of which are strong anti-fungals.

A 2-part system that contains the above should be combined with the following for best results:

- Enzyme supplements to support the anti-fungal program should be taken on an empty stomach to help break down the cell wall of the yeast, which is comprised of protein, fat and chitin. A good supplement would contain the following: 300 000 HUT of protease, 112 500 CU of cellulose, 45 000 HCU of hemicellulase, 22 500 mcg. Lysozyme and 18 000 DU of amylase. It should also contain invertase, lactase, malt diatase and lipase. This should be taken on an empty stomach, before bed.
- Plant enzymes can also be used with meals. These should include protease, amylase, lipase and cellulose. This formula might also include ginger, marshmallow, papaya, bromelain and gamma oryzanol. Take one before and after meals. HCl can be very helpful if the stomach acid level is low.
- Take essential fatty acids. A combination of fish and flax oils with borage oil is good to reduce inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract. Absorption of the oils may be enhanced with the addition of lipase (a fat-digesting enzyme). Take 3-6 1000mg capsules twice daily with food.
- Take a fiber supplement that provides a balance of both soluble and insoluble fibers. A flax/borage seed combination is a good choice, articulary one that contains other beneficial ingredients such as probiotic blend with fructooligosaccharides (FOS) and herbs like slippery elm bark, marshmallow and fennel seed. Another key ingredient would be L-glutamine, which the intestines use as fuel to regenerate.
- To assist in rebuilding the intestinal lining and in reestablishing good bacteria:
- Take a probiotic supplement with multiple strains as a daily supplement. It should contain a minimum of 2 to 6 billion cultures.
- Take 5000mg to 10 000mg of L-glutamine powder with N-acetyl-glucosamine (NAG) and gamma oryzanol once to twice daily on an empty stomach.
- Enhancing the immune system is an important factor in eliminating Candida. For this:
 - Take a multivitamin/mineral daily.
 - Take antioxidant supplements (vitamin C-1000-3000mg, vitamin A-10 000IU daily and zinc-30 mg daily) after meals.
 - This protocol should be adhered to for at least 3 months. After that, drop the anti-fungal and L-glutamine powder, and stay on the rest of the protocol as good digestive maintenance.

Complementary Mind/Body Therapies

Colon hydrotherapy is excellent for removing waste from the colon.

Massage- this stress-relieving therapy is also extremely beneficial for anyone with Candida.

Biofeedback

Music therapy

Chiropractic