Experts estimate that three of four women are afflicted with yeast infections at least once during their lives, and half of all women endure them on a recurrent basis. The solution to yeast overgrowth, however, does not have to be complicated. Small revisions in lifestyle, supplements and diet can increase your body's ability to resist this condition.

When we talk about yeast overgrowth, whether it be a systemic yeast issue leading to diaper rash or athlete's foot, or a digestive tract issue causing ailments such as thrush, what we are referring to is an imbalance of our body's healthy flora or beneficial bacteria. Whether we'd like to believe it or not, our bodies play host to trillions of microscopic bacteria and other microbes. The majority of these live in the digestive tract, but they are found in all orifices, from the sinus to the belly button. Yeast thrive in the alkaline portions of our digestive system, and they are present in just about everyone. In a healthy body they live in small numbers, typically in the small intestine, but are also found in our mucous membranes. One of these microscopic yeast organisms is called Candida albicans, and it has gained notoriety as of late. In a healthy digestive system, Candida lives in a ratio of approximately one Candida cell for every million bacteria. When the number of yeast cells grows out of the 1:1,000,000 ratio, a person is said to have a flora or yeast imbalance.
Yeast—Not just a woman’s problem

Although commonly referred to as a woman’s issue, yeast overgrowth actually affects both men and women, as well as children and the elderly. Aside from vaginal infection, yeast may present in the following ways:

- Skin rashes such as athlete’s foot or diaper rash
- Jock itch or skin infections in the groin area
- Prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate gland)
- Lack of libido
- Thrush (a fungal infection characterized by white spots on the tongue and in mouth)
- Fungal nail infections
- Changes in bowel habits (such as alternating diarrhea and constipation)
- Food and environmental sensitivities or allergies
- Itchy ears or sinus irritations
- Sore throat
- Persistent heartburn

Yeast Overgrowth

Your body’s immune system and the beneficial bacteria that live in your intestinal tract are designed to keep Candida and other pathogens harmlessly in check. There are two main types of beneficial bacteria or probiotics found in our digestive system: Lactobacillus is the primary probiotic of the small intestine, and Bifidobacterium is the primary probiotic in the large intestine. The more we have of these probiotics, the less space and food is available for harmful bacteria and yeast.

Due to many factors, yeast can proliferate and cause health issues. Many times the problem can be traced back to the things we put in our body or expose ourselves to, including a stressful lifestyle. Some of the common causes of flora imbalance are repeated antibiotic use, birth control pills and cortisone drugs, and the over-consumption of sugar and refined carbohydrates. Many women experience a flora imbalance during PMS or pregnancy due to fluctuations in hormone levels.

According to Trent Nichols, MD, an internist, nutritionist and gastroenterologist who practices at the Center for Nutrition and Digestive Disorders in Hanover, Pennsylvania, “There are lots of reasons people get Candida [overgrowth]:

- Antibiotic overuse can cause an imbalance of flora, flora dysbiosis, when you start getting a lot of pathological microorganisms. Also when your immunity is down or you have a viral infection you are more likely to have Candida [overgrowth].” It just makes sense that a round of antibiotics, which kills off beneficial bacteria in your digestive tract, can create an environment that allows Candida to thrive: With little or no bacteria to compete with, yeasts and fungi take the opportunity to reproduce and fill in the abandoned ecological niche.

Dr. Nichols, author of the book Optimal Digestive Health, points out, “The mercury from amalgam fillings is [also] suspect.” It is believed that the presence of this heavy metal in dental fillings is lethal to the friendly bacteria that help keep Candida under control. So individuals with mercury fillings are encouraged to evaluate this risk. Dr. Nichols notes that hormone supplementation as well as the use of prednisone (a steroid) and other medications that suppress immunity can also increase your risk of developing a yeast infection.

Toxin Release

When the fungal levels in our bodies increase, we may experience symptoms such as nail fungus, vaginal yeast overgrowth, itchy skin, gas, bloating, and sugar and carbohydrate cravings. Sufferers often describe a feeling of being worn out and fatigued. This is because when yeast overgrows in the body, it consumes the foods we eat for its own fuel and growth. As Candida overgrows, also it releases toxic substances that make you feel run down and can make your thoughts seem foggy. The multiplying colonies of yeast release acids that may render your internal environment more acidic. This increase in acidity often allows other harmful microorganisms to survive in the intestines, releasing more toxins and in turn compromising the body’s health even further.

Candida also produces beta alanine, a compound that interferes with the kidneys’ reabsorption of the amino acid taurine. Interference with taurine metabolism can lead to lowered levels of magnesium and potassium, crucial electrolytes that maintain circulation and blood pressure. Tampering with the taurine supply can also disrupt the liver’s detoxification functions. The end result: your immunity drops, leaving you more vulnerable to secondary infections. You may also suffer vaginitis, gas and bloating, heartburn, decreased libido and a host of other problems associated with fungal invasion. Although a simple case of thrush in the mouth seems harmless, this same organism, if allowed to grow uncontrollably, can even threaten the life of someone with a compromised immune system.

Managing Your Microbial Populations

Most experts agree that diagnosing yeast overgrowth is best performed by a medical professional who can
thoroughly analyze your medical history. A series of questions focusing on yeast-related problems is usually part of this process. Conventional doctors treat yeast infections with anti-fungal medicines such as Nizoral, Nystatin and Diflucan.

According to Florida-based gastroenterologist Leonard Smith, "Allopathic medicine does a great job with anti-fungals on the seriously ill. However, when patients have low-grade recurrent Candida infections, they are treated with appropriate anti-fungal agents, but then they are offered nothing else to prevent recurrence." While these anti-fungal drugs can effectively kill the Candida organism, unless you alter the conditions that resulted in the overgrowth, the yeast will usually come right back. In addition, when you take these drugs, the body may eliminate them before they reach the colon, allowing Candida in the lower part of your digestive tract to survive.

**Bring Back the Good Bacteria**

The best way to boost your chances of avoiding yeast overgrowth is to alter your diet and use supplements that support your body in its anti-Candida efforts. Dr. Nichols notes that taking probiotic supplements, containing beneficial bacteria that maintain the health of the digestive tract, is crucial to helping the body rid itself of Candida. "Probiotics help restore optimal digestive health," he says. "One of the first things you need to do is bring back beneficial bacteria."

Eliminating sugar and foods with added sugar also helps your body fight back against yeast infections. Candida thrives on sugar and the immune system may be weakened when you consume too many simple carbohydrates. According to Jonathan Kalman, ND, who practices in San Diego, "A refined diet makes Candida worse. "You have to be careful not to eat too many sweets."

Adds Dr. Nichols, "On an anti-Candida diet, you should stick to low-glycemic vegetables (vegetables low in sugar). Limit your fruits, use fewer sweeteners and fruit juices." Dr. Kalman also warns that when you are "in an acute stage of Candida, you should avoid alcoholic beverages, cheeses, dried fruits and peanuts." Taking enzymes between meals can help break down Candida by attacking its cell walls. On an empty stomach right before bed, take a supplement that contains protease, cellulase, hemicellulase, lysozyme, amylase, lipase, invertase, malt diastase and lactase. Taking plant-based enzyme supplements before and after your meals supports your digestive system. These include protease, lipase, cellulase and amylase. If your stomach acid is low, your supplement should include hydrochloric acid (HCl).

Herbs that ease digestion such as marshmallow and ginger should also be taken with meals. Using a supplement containing fish, flax and borage oils with lipase (an enzyme that aids fat absorption) can boost the body's defenses against yeast and other invasions. Fish oil and other beneficial fats have been shown to help the body balance inflammation. To help the digestive tract regenerate, take L-glutamine with N-acetyl D-glucosamine (NAG) and gamma oryzanol once or twice a day between meals. Fiber supplements that combine flax, along with fructooligosaccharide (which provides nutrition for beneficial intestinal flora), also help the intestines repair themselves.

**Immune Boosters**

Yeast overgrowth is often a sign that your immune system needs help. Consequently, using a daily vitamin or whole food multinutrient product that supplies B vitamins and other micronutrients supports immunity. In addition, supplementary antioxidants, including vitamin C, vitamin A, zinc and selenium, also support immune function.

When managing Candida, your initial one-month to three-month anti-fungal program (depending on the extent of your infection) should include an herbal cleanse, along with enzymes and probiotics to promote a healthy intestinal environment. After that initial period, you can discontinue the anti-fungal herbs, but continue taking the enzymes and nutrient supplements to support a healthy balance of yeast in your system.

**Digestive Enzymes are an Integral Part of a Successful Yeast Management Program.** They aid in the digestion of simple carbohydrates that Candida would otherwise use for food, and target the cell wall of yeast to weaken its structure.

**Look for products that contain:**
- **Lysozyme** – a potent enzyme also found in human tears and saliva; helps break down chitin, rupturing the cell wall of yeast
- **Protease** – digestive enzyme that breaks down proteins
- **Cellulase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down cellulose (plant fiber)
- **Hemicellulase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down hemicellulose (plant fiber)
- **Amylase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down starches and sugars
- **Invertase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down sugars
- **Lactase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down lactose or dairy sugar
- **Malt diastase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down starches and sugars
- **Lipase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down fats
- **Glucoamylase** – digestive enzyme that breaks down starches and sugars

**Several herbs and minerals have been found to be particularly useful in controlling Candida.**

**These include:**
- **Uva Ursi:** acknowledged by the German Commission E (which regulates herbs) to be an anti-infective against Candida
- **Neem Leaf:** contains natural substances that help the body kill pathogens
- **Olive Leaf:** supports immunity against Candida and other fungi
- **Oregon Grape Root:** contains berberine, a natural antibiotic
- **Oregano Leaf:** contains anti-fungal alkaloid
- **Berberine Sulfate:** derived from barberry, this natural compound helps fight bacteria and yeast
- **Calcium Undecylenate:** castor bean derivative that kills Candida
Tips for embarking on an anti-Candida eating plan:

- Eliminate sugar from your meals; use stevia and Lo Han as sweeteners
- Eliminate items made from white flour
- Don’t consume soft drinks of any kind; instead drink lots of water and caffeine-free herbal teas
- Drink fresh green juice instead of fruit juice
- Avoid cheese and dairy products
- Use only raw apple cider vinegar from your health food store; avoid other vinegars; avoid mayonnaise, soy sauce or salad dressings; substitute fresh-squeezed lemon juice for vinegar
- Eat organic vegetables
- Limit your intake of beans and potatoes
- Eat fish, eggs, organic meat and tofu
- Eat nuts that have been soaked overnight in purified water
- Soak whole grains overnight (brown rice, amaranth, buckwheat, millet, steel-cut oats, teff, kamut, or spelt)
- Use cold-pressed oils; limit the use of butter

Take The Candida Self-Test

1. Do you experience regular fatigue and/or muscle aches and pains?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

2. Do you have food sensitivities or food allergies?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

3. Have you experienced nail fungus, athlete’s foot or jock itch?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

4. Do you have recurrent vaginal yeast overgrowth?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

5. Have you taken broad-spectrum antibiotics—even for one period?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

6. Do you crave sugar?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

7. Do you commonly have gas and bloating?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

8. Do you crave bread, pasta, etc. (any type of refined white flour)?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

9. Have you taken birth control pills for 6 months or longer?
   YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

10. Do you experience brain fog?
    YES____NO____ (YES = 1 NO = 0) _______________→

A score of 3 or higher indicates you may be suffering from Candida overgrowth. TOTAL SCORE ___

This article and results of the self-test are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical care. If you suspect that you have a yeast infection or are suffering from yeast overgrowth, please see your physician.