

Treating Candidiasis

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Candida...The Cause of Your Health Problems?

The term Candida refers to a type of yeast. We've all heard the term yeast and most of us associate it with the yeast used for cooking and the aroma of fresh baked bread or even a refreshing glass of beer or wine.

Candida organisms pervade our surroundings. They can be found in our air, in our clothing, in warm, moist rooms such as bathrooms, in the books in our libraries, in our carpeting, in foods like bread and cheese and in beverages such as wine, beer and fruit juices. Most importantly, Candida organisms make their homes inside our bodies. They live on our skin and nails, in our mucous membranes and abundantly in our digestive tracts.

There is a large variety of yeasts, but it is the Candida family which tends to create the greatest devastation in humans, particularly Candida Albicans. Candida Albicans is the type of yeast most commonly recovered at sites of infections, and it is the most infectious strain of yeast. It multiplies rapidly and colonizes (makes a home) in our mucus membranes easily.

Most of us were colonized with yeast at birth, as we moved through the birth canal. Under normal circumstances Candida remain benign and are kept under control by the "friendly" bacterial flora in the intestinal tract. These friendly bacteria inhibit the growth of Candida and various harmful bacteria. Some of these beneficial bacteria are Lactobacilli Acidophilus and Bifido Bacterium.

Candidiasis is a term used to describe a condition in which there is an overgrowth of yeast in the intestinal tract. Under certain conditions in the body, the yeast can change from a yeast form to a mycelial form, having root-like growths. While in search of food, these mycelial yeasts can penetrate the walls of the intestines and come into contact with the bloodstream. They then send out toxic waste products from their reproduction. And, due to the damage to the intestinal wall, they allow for the absorption into the bloodstream of other toxins from the bowel, such as undigested proteins, alcohols and ammonia. These toxic products can create serious dysfunction in virtually any system of the body.

Candidiasis can occur in people of all ages and in both sexes. Due to the hormonal involvement with women and the reproductive tract, they tend to present with more symptomology than men, but men are just as likely to develop the condition of Candidiasis as long as the conditions for yeast overgrowth exist.

There are a vast number of symptoms resulting from Candidiasis because of the fact that the fungus and its toxins can exert a negative influence on almost any part of the body. It seems that the first areas of the body to be

affected by the yeast overgrowth are the gastrointestinal tract and the urogenital tract. It is not uncommon for one to experience abdominal pain and bloating, heartburn, colitis, gastritis, flatulence, severe constipation and/or diarrhea, an inability to digest food, chronic bladder and/or vaginal yeast infections, kidney infections and prostatitis.

Candida patients often proclaim, "Everything I eat turns to gas. It takes dynamite for me to have a bowel movement. I've been on laxatives for years." Or, "Every time I have intercourse, I develop a bladder or vaginal yeast infection."

As the toxic waste products of the yeast and other bowel toxins, undigested proteins, alcohols and ammonias circulate through the bloodstream, one often experiences allergy symptoms. These may manifest as hay fever, sinusitis, chronic ear infections, hives, asthma, coughs, eczema, psoriasis, headaches, dizziness, rapid pulse, anxiety, muscle aches, acne, and food and chemical sensitivities. Hyperactivity in children can also be a result of this phenomenon. The chemically sensitive person may experience symptoms, even around perfumes, colognes, hair spray, pesticides, gas fumes, cigarette smoke, furniture polish, household cleaners, laundry detergents, etc. He or she may also complain of allergies to a long list of foods. And, in time one develops more severe symptoms in response to a wider variety of stimuli. Gradually one becomes imprisoned by his or her allergies.

The central nervous system can soon be affected by the yeast overgrowth. One may experience fatigue, irritability, deterioration of mental faculties, loss of libido, joint pains and stiffness and numbness and tingling of the extremities. Candidiasis can also create or intensify the malfunction of particular glands and organs. It often plays a significant role in thyroid and adrenal disorders, diabetes, hypoglycemia, menstrual irregularities, menstrual cramps, PMS, depression, endometriosis, infertility and miscarriages.

A typical example of Candidiasis is a woman between 20 and 45 years of age. She complains of chronic vaginal itching, burning and discharge. She has numerous vaginal suppositories which she has used to reduce the symptoms, but the symptoms never go away completely and always return. She has chronic urinary infections for which she has been given several broad-spectrum antibiotics, and has been told to take more antibiotics every time she has intercourse. These also are not helping. She is plagued with constant abdominal bloat and gas and has bouts of severe constipation for which she takes a variety of laxatives. At times she also experiences diarrhea for extended intervals. Her menstrual cycle is very irregular, sometimes 35 days, sometimes 50 days. She suffers from extreme PMS, a loss of sexual desire and depression. She says she is having trouble remembering things. Her diet is primarily fast foods. She says she has an incessant craving for sweets, breads and cheese and her favorite food is ice cream.

Patients with this intricate combination of symptoms of Candidiasis often consult a multitude of doctors such as, allergists, neurologists, gastroenterologists, gynecologists, endocrinologists and psychiatrists, and are often told they just need to take it easy for a while. They soon become convinced that they are just being hypochondriacs and that it's all in their minds.

There are numerous predisposing factors to the development of Candidiasis. It has been demonstrated that *Candida* organisms can multiply during periods when immunity is low. Conditions which stimulate yeast growth include the use of antibiotics, birth control pills, cortisone and other steroids; pregnancy; diets rich in refined carbohydrates, yeast and mold derivatives; exposure to chemicals; chemotherapy and multiple surgeries. It is not only the antibiotics and other drugs that we purchase at our local pharmacy which act as culprits. It is also the antibiotics and hormones with which our meat and poultry products are inundated. In addition, we are exposed to a vast array of more chemicals through our food, as our produce is often heavily treated with pesticides, dyes and preservatives. Thus, over extended periods of time we ingest low levels of antibiotics, drugs and chemicals.

It has been found also, that Candidiasis often goes hand in hand with chronic viral infections such as Epstein Barr Virus and Cytomegalovirus. This may reflect an immune system so depleted by these viruses that it has no resistance to the yeast overgrowth. And it seems that in some cases, having Candidiasis may predispose one to a chronic viral infection as yeast overgrowth can severely lower ones immunity.

Anyone interested in treating a yeast problem should see a practitioner who specializes in Candidiasis, as its diagnosis and treatment require a significant amount of knowledge and experience. Today there are specific blood tests and stool cultures that can be performed to ascertain if Candidiasis may be affecting ones health. Very important to the diagnosis of this disease is a history of predisposing factors, i.e., use of antibiotics, birth control pills, steroids, etc. The symptoms one is experiencing are also critical to the diagnosis. For example, if a woman says she has extreme food and chemical sensitivities, abdominal pain and bloat and chronic vaginal infections, there is a very good chance Candidiasis plays a part in her illness.

A key factor in the treatment of Candidiasis is strengthening the immune system. Blood work should be taken to ascertain where there are deficiencies. I see *Candida* patients time after time who are low in the vitamins B12 and folic acid. They are often also zinc deficient. Other vitamins that are used are, for example, vitamins A and C and essential fatty acids such as primrose oil and fish oil. Thyroid and adrenal function should also be tested. Many patients suffering with Candidiasis are also hypoglycemic and/or hypothyroid. In addition, they often are plagued with parasitic infections. These conditions need to be addressed in conjunction with the treatment of Candidiasis.

Dietary changes are essential to the treatment of Candidiasis. Foods such as sugar and other refined carbohydrates, alcohol, dairy products, fermented and smoked foods, foods containing vinegar and foods made from yeast must be reduced and replaced by foods which do not encourage yeast growth, such as vegetables, proteins and complex carbohydrates.

There is a large variety of natural products which kill yeast without creating the side effects associated with western medical approaches. Products containing caprylic acid, undecylenic acid, berberine sulfate and grapefruit seed extract can be very effective for those who can tolerate them. Antifungal herbal preparations containing oregano oil, goldenseal, uva ursi, garlic, pau d' arco, clove, astragalus, coptis, phellodendron and white oak bark are also effective. Most importantly, the intestinal flora need to be recolonized with the "friendly bacteria," such as, Lactobacilli Acidophilus and Bifido Bacterium. There are numerous products available now to replace the "friendly" flora that will reach deep into the mucus membranes of the intestines.

As a Doctor of Oriental Medicine and an Acupuncturist I view Candidiasis as primarily a Spleen Deficiency pattern with accompanying dampness, manifesting as a lack of appetite, abdominal gas and bloat, diarrhea or constipation, heavy limbs, heavy sensation in the head (foggy thinking), fatigue, chilliness and cold extremities. There is often a liver component involved, i.e., Liver Heat causing migraines, PMS, insomnia, constipation and irritability and Liver Qi Stagnation creating mood swings, depression, abdominal pain, menstrual cramps, heartburn, etc. Lastly, as with many chronic illnesses, there is a Kidney Deficiency often creating the symptoms of frequent urination, infertility, edema, dizziness, vision problems, ringing in the ears and poor memory.

Acupuncture is extremely beneficial when treating Candidiasis as it can strengthen the spleen and kidneys and disperse the Spleen Dampness and Liver Heat. Acupuncture is also very effective at enhancing the immune system which is crucial when treating a patient with Candidiasis. Combining Acupuncture with dietary guidelines and appropriate antifungal products can be a very successful treatment for eradicating the condition of Candidiasis.

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