



Dr. Huizenga

## BUSTLE

### 7 Things That Can Seem Like STI Symptoms But May Not Be, According To Doctors

By: Kristine Fellizar | 18 July 2018



Finding something unusual going on in your body can be a cause for concern. But according to doctors, you don't necessarily have to worry that you have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) just yet. There are certain things that can seem like symptoms of STIs but may not be.

"Some symptoms that are commonly associated with a particular STI could also mean something else entirely," Dr. Kristamarie Collman, MD tells Bustle. For instance, finding "thick, white, cottage cheese-like discharge" in your underwear can be worrisome, especially if you had unprotected sex recently. But as Dr. Kristamarie says, this can be both a symptom of an STI, and a vaginal yeast infection. Of course, if you have any doubts, your best is to see your doctor to get a clear diagnosis.

Regardless of whether your symptoms end up being an STI or not, just keep in mind that there are an estimated 20 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections each year. STIs are very common, after all, and while they are nothing to be ashamed of they are also preventable. That's why doctors stress the importance of being smart when it comes to sex.

But if you are wondering whether or not symptoms are an STI, it is best to discuss them with your doctor and get tested. Here are some things that can seem like STI symptoms, but may not be, according to doctors.

#### 1. Itching

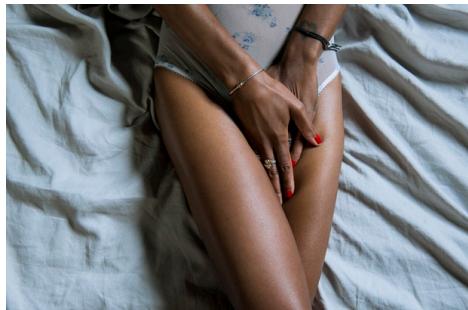




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Itching in the genital area can easily be mistaken for STIs like chlamydia, gonorrhea, HPV, or trichomoniasis. But as Dr. Angela Jones, Astroglide's resident sexual health advisor, tells Bustle, "This could be something as simple as a dermatitis, i.e. caused by something that is coming into direct contact with your vagina or vulva such as pads, certain materials, and soaps." This could also be a result of a "vaginitis-like yeast" or bacterial vaginosis. But if you are unsure, consult with your doctor.

## **2. Bumps Or Scales In The Genital Area**



When you think bumps in the genital area, it's easy to automatically assume herpes. But as Dr. Susan Bard, MD of Manhattan Dermatology Specialists tells Bustle, bumps in that area can also be folliculitis, which is an inflammation or infection of the hair follicle. Folliculitis can show up as sore, itchy, red or white bumps that pretty much look like pimples. "This often occurs after shaving and is exacerbated by sweat and friction," she says. Women can also have vestibular papillomatosis, which are growths that can show up on the vulva.

These growths can show up in a line or in patches on both sides of the vulva. These typically look like smooth, round bumps that are about one to two millimeters in diameter. According to Dr. Bard, these are perfectly common but can be misdiagnosed as genital warts. Unlike genital warts, these don't require treatment. Finally, using new condoms or lubricants can also cause contact dermatitis, which can show up as "itchy sometimes even scaly plaques" in the genital area.

## **3. Bumps On The Lips**





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Fordyce spots, which are tiny yellowish bumps that are found on the lips and genitals can also be mistaken for STIs like herpes. But according to Dr. Bard, these are "normal oil producing glands that are there to keep those areas lubricated." These too do not require treatment.

### **3. Spotting Or Irregular Bleeding After Intercourse**



Unusual spotting or bleeding after sex can be alarming and can be associated with gonorrhea or chlamydia. But as Dr. Jones says, this can also be attributed to "benign things" such as uterine or cervical polyps, ovarian cysts, or uterine fibroids. If it becomes persistent, or you're in pain, it is best to check in with your OB/GYN.

### **4. Vaginal Discharge That Looks Or Smells Different**



For some, U by Kotex partner Dr. Jessica Shepherd, MD, MBA, tells Bustle that vaginal discharge could also be mistaken for something abnormal or cause for concern. However, this is totally common. "This is all part of the body's process to help keep the vagina moist and aid in natural cleansing," Dr. Shepherd says. "The thickness and amount varies through your menstrual cycle because of hormone fluctuations." White to clear discharge that is watery to stretchy is considered normal, though it varies from person to person. That's why it's important to pay attention to its color, smell, and consistency in order to know what's normal for you. "If you start to experience abnormalities in color, consistency, the amount of discharge or experiencing discomfort like itching, it's important to consult with a trusted health care provider," she says.

### **5. Abnormal Smelling Pee**



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As [Dr. Robert Huizenga](#) tells Bustle, some of the most common urinary tract infection symptoms can be mistaken for an STI. These include discomfort during urination, frequent urination, abnormal smell, and blood in the urine. "These symptoms most often represent a bacterial infection of the bladder that can be associated with sex but is not a [STI]," he says.

#### 6. Pain Or Discomfort During Sex



Bacterial vaginosis can have similar symptoms as an STI, like bad smelling vaginal discharge, itching or even painful intercourse. But as Dr. Kristamarie says, these symptoms can be caused by factors that lead to a bacterial imbalance in the vagina.

If you are exhibiting any of these symptoms, you should talk to your doctor about it. These may not be caused by an STI, but even if it is, there's nothing to be ashamed of. Regardless, it's still a good idea to check with your health care provider to get the right treatment for you.

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