

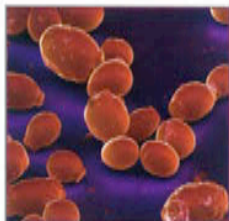
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Tackling common complaints

Imogen Matthews reviews treatments for a range of troublesome conditions

Sometimes it's no fun being a woman — thrush, cystitis, water retention and premenstrual tension affect most women at some point in their lives. Although these conditions are usually no more than a nuisance, they can often make life uncomfortable until treated. Fortunately, the pharmacy is where most women know they can get a sympathetic ear and proper advice.

Thrush and cystitis

Vaginal thrush is the common term for infections of the vagina with *Candida* species of fungi, in particular *Candida albicans*. The symptoms are inflammation and discharge. Fluconazole is used to treat a number of different types of fungal and yeast infections and can usually be treated with a single dose by mouth. However, some other infections may require six to eight weeks of treatment.

Diflucan One capsules (Pfizer) contain the active ingredient fluconazole and work by killing the *Candida* fungi causing the thrush infection by interfering with their cell membranes. As fluconazole causes holes to appear in the cell membranes, essential constituents of the fungal cells can leak out. The fluconazole kills the fungi and treats the infection.

The best selling thrush product on the market is Canestan Duo (Bayer Consumer) which combines a capsule to clear the internal infection and a double strength cream to soothe itching. According to IRI market research data for the 52 weeks commencing February 24, the market is currently worth £40m at retail prices. Canestan Duo is currently on TV on all major national terrestrial and satellite channels until August 12 in a campaign to encourage women who want a hassle-free and effective treatment to trade up to a combination product. Canesten Duo's brand manager comments: "We feel confident that this broadcast support behind Canestan Duo will help to drive women in store for pharmacists' advice and recommendation on combination



Scanning electron micrograph of the fungus *Candida albicans*

products."

AAH Pharmaceuticals has added a women's health section to its range of Vantage own label medicines and products. They include single dose fluconazole capsules and clotrimazole 1 per cent BP cream for thrush, and sodium citrate sachets for the relief of cystitis.

"Brands are more expensive and, therefore, customers often prefer to buy a cheaper alternative," points out Steve Dunn, group managing director, AAH Pharmaceuticals. "This range is at least £1.50 cheaper than its nearest equivalent. Pharmacists also make a

higher profit on return on Vantage own brand products."

The company also provides own label brochures which include details of the products for the pharmacist, and a flyer sent out to Vantage own label customers promoting the products.

According to www.prodigy.nhs.uk, around 40 per cent of women will suffer from cystitis at some point in their lives. Cystitis is an infection and/or inflammation of the bladder which causes a burning sensation and a frequent need to urinate. Reducing the acidity of urine can help relieve the burning, stinging

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sensation when passing urine. Products containing sodium citrate or potassium citrate may be helpful in easing some of the symptoms. They also make the environment in the bladder less suitable for the survival of the infecting bacteria. In addition, over-the-counter painkillers like paracetamol and ibuprofen can be taken to reduce discomfort.

Cymalon (Thornton & Ross) is a popular treatment, which comes as a lemon flavoured sachet containing sodium citrate that is mixed with water. Cymalon Cranberry Liquid is a low sodium formula containing potassium citrate. Cystitis sufferers should also drink as much water as they can during the treatment to help flush any bacteria out of the bladder.

Cranberry juice contains chemicals which are said to inhibit the activity of *E coli*, the bacteria most often responsible for cystitis. As it is not always possible to include cranberry

juice in the daily diet and most juices on the market also contain large amounts of sugar, Power Health's Cranberry supplements, made from concentrated juice extract, are a simple no-fuss alternative. The Cranberry supplements range includes capsules, double strength tablets and concentrate drink mix, which are currently available in pharmacies with a 50 per cent discount.

PMT and water retention

According to the National Association for Premenstrual Syndrome (NAPS) premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) is a severe form of PMS (premenstrual syndrome) that affects up to 10 per cent of women in the UK. Symptoms can vary so much that women are often misdiagnosed with mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. Despite many women being told there is no treatment available for PMDD, there are a variety of approaches to make the symptoms more manageable. Chocolate, alcohol and caffeine can all intensify symptoms, so should be left out of the diet. Evening primrose oil is also believed to help ease breast tenderness and fluid retention.

In several studies published in 2006 by Professor Basant Puri, consultant in psychiatry and imaging at Imperial College and Hammersmith Hospital, London, high supplementation of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) was found to have a beneficial effect on symptoms of PMS and depression, because the body metabolises essential fatty acids (EFAs) into hormone-like substances called prostaglandins that can help regulate the menstrual cycle. VegEPA capsules contain a balance of ultra-pure EPA from marine fish oil and gamma linolenic acid (GLA) from organic virgin evening primrose oil, providing a highly concentrated source of omega-3 and omega-6 long-chain fatty acids.

Three out of five women suffer from some discomfort and bloating during the run up to their period, claim G. R. Lane Health Products, makers of Aquaban. Water retention is essentially excess water trapped in bodily tissue that cannot be excreted by normal bodily processes such as sweating or urinating. It often occurs due to hormone imbalances in the body during the menstrual cycle. Common symptoms include gaining weight and swelling in the hands, ankles and abdomen, which can feel bloated and tender. Clothes, rings and even shoes can become uncomfortable. Aquaban contains a blend of three herbal diuretics which work together to help get rid of the water that builds up in the body's tissues and cells without leaving women dehydrated. In tests [*Clinical Trials Journal* 1988;25(6):424-39], Aquaban has been found to be highly effective in reducing the PMS symptoms of weight gain.

Bladder weakness

Bladder weakness, or urinary incontinence, is the condition when the bladder leaks involuntarily. According to TNS consumer

research in 2004, one in four of all women over the age of 35 experience bladder weakness, making the condition more common than hay fever. Weakened pelvic floor muscles, the result of being stretched and weakened during childbirth and being overweight, can be a major cause. Everyday activities such as laughing or coughing may cause urine to escape. The menopause is another time when bladder weakness manifests itself, due to the reduction of oestrogen, which affects the abdominal muscles, resulting in the bladder shifting position.

Tena (SCA Hygiene Products) is the leading brand within the £44m incontinence market, with a 82.4 per cent share, according to IRI market research data for 2006. Tena pants is the leading range, growing by 45 per cent. With a £6m promotional spend on Tena in 2007, SCA Hygiene is predicting similar levels of growth for the brand this year. Tena's customer profile is women over 45 requiring security and confidence for specific social and lifestyle events, such as a holiday or wedding, and women over 60, who need increased security on a more permanent basis.

Tena Lady Mini Magic was introduced in 2006 and is the size of a panty-liner but claiming to be "eight times drier". It has been designed as a discreet solution for those who use ordinary panty-liners as a stop gap measure.

"For many women accepting they have a bladder weakness problem is an admission of imperfection and ageing," explains Dr Catherine Hood, relationship and sexual health expert. "This is crazy when we know that so many other women have it and many are clearly still young. Many women think purpose-made, bladder-weakness pads are bulky and uncomfortable. This isn't the case." Tena Lady Mini Magic features "magic crystals" which absorb liquid faster to "lock away moisture" and neutralise odour. Tiny funnel shaped channels in the surface layer are designed to draw moisture away leaving it dry so as to prevent irritation from acidic surface moisture.

The company has introduced a new pharmacy development pack to help pharmacists exploit the growing incontinence category.

"The contents tackle the need for both consumers and pharmacists to be more open and comfortable about discussing bladder weakness issues," says Nick Foulger, Tena brand manager. "An estimated 75 per cent of women with the condition are still using an unsuitable product and we are very focused on educating them that purpose-made products provide greater security, comfort and hygiene."

Kimberly Clark recently renamed its Poise range as Depend. It comprises a range of absorbency pads and liners from light to heavy bladder weakness that are individually wrapped for discreet portability. The company is using Carol Thatcher to speak out on the subject of incontinence in order to break down the taboo associated with the condition.

Product update

AAH Pharmaceutical has added a women's health section to its range of Vantage own label medicines and products. The company now offers Fluconazole (£1.29), used as an antifungal agent, in 150mg oral single dose capsules for relief from the symptoms of thrush. Also available in the section are sodium citrate sachets, to relieve the symptoms of cystitis, in a pack of six sachets, available in cranberry flavour, for £0.85. AAH has also launched Vantage clotrimazole cream 1 per cent BP. The cream is offered for relief for fungal infections and costs £1.21. The Vantage team can be contacted at vantageownlabel@aaah.co.uk.
VANTAGE 02476 432000



Pfizer Consumer Healthcare has launched Regaine for Women Healthy Hair Supplements, a nutritional supplement containing a blend of amino acids, antioxidants, minerals and coenzymes. The supplement is designed to provide the right conditions for hair growth and natural cell

renewal. The company says that the supplement is not only for those suffering from hair thinning, but those concerned about the general health of their hair. The supplement is available in a pastel pink and silver foil box containing 30 tablets. There is more information about the Regaine range at www.regaine.com.
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