

## NATURAL REMEDIES FOR VAGINAL HEALTH

**M**any women have experienced the annoying and sometimes painful symptoms of vaginitis. The term vaginitis covers a broad range of vaginal irritations. For more specifics, please see the handouts on vaginal health put out by The Vancouver Women's Health Information Centre.

**S**ome doctors treat the irritations as a woman's fate or repeatedly prescribe antibiotics which can aggravate other problems. A woman may be labeled promiscuous or viewed to be wasting the doctor's time with trivial complaints. Ideally every woman would have a health practitioner who listened to her concerns, provided accurate information and supported varying health treatments. Most women don't, so this article considers various natural remedies for vaginal discharges, overgrowths and infections.

**T**he treatments are easy to use, and less costly than most prescribed medications. These treatments also give women some control over their own health choices. Women often know they have a problem before it is visible enough to be deemed treatable by a doctor. Home remedies can often be used without unwanted side effects, and then if the problem persists, you can seek help from your health practitioner. These treatments do not work for every woman and you may have to experiment to find the most effective treatments for yourself.

**T**he vagina is self cleaning and has normal secretions which help protect your health. These secretions vary throughout the menstrual cycle, but do not burn, itch or have an unpleasant odor. Routine douching is not necessary, for vaginal cleanliness, but can be helpful if you experience symptoms of vaginal irritation. The risk of getting vaginitis arises when the vagina's acidity decreases or the bacteria which fight harmful organisms are damaged.

**S**ociety perpetuates the myth that women's bodies are dirty. In fact, menstruation and natural vaginal secretions do not have to be deodorized or denied as part of women's bodily functions. Deodorant tampons and feminine hygiene sprays can aggravate vaginal irritation and may mask a problem beneath layers of chemicals and perfumes. Having a vaginal discharge or irritation does not mean you are dirty, and actually, some discharge can be normal and healthy. These are common concerns of many women. You can learn how to determine the difference between discharges and alleviate the symptoms that are from irritation and infection. You can also learn how to prevent them from recurring.

**I**f you suspect you have an infection of any type it is helpful to be tested and have a vaginal culture done. This ensures that you know what kind of infection(s) you have. You can determine how you

want to proceed with treatment and what natural remedies may be most beneficial.

**T**he following three treatments are useful for slight itchiness or irritation.

- ★ **Garlic Suppositories:** Garlic contains sulphur and acts as a natural antibiotic. Peel a clove of garlic being careful not to nick the edge since the juice may cause a burning sensation. Place the clove in a piece of gauze about one foot long and 3/4 inch wide. Fold the gauze in half and twist it below the clove to make a tampon with a gauze tail. Then dip the garlic end in vegetable oil to make it easier to insert. Insert into vagina. Change it with a fresh clove at least every 12 hours.
- ★ **Betadine Douche & Vagisec Suppositories:** Betadine is an antibacterial agent available at drugstores. Douche every morning with 1 tsp. Betadine in a pint of warm water. Insert one Vagisec suppository either before bed and or after intercourse. Continue this treatment through one complete menstrual cycle. Do not use this douche if you are allergic to iodine. Also Betadine stains a bright brown.
- ★ **Vinegar Douche:** Mix 2 tbs. white vinegar with 1 quart water. Do not use apple cider or wine vinegar as they can worsen the infection. Both contain sugar and are produced by fermentation involving yeast. The vinegar solution can be used as a douche or in a sitz bath. A menstrual sponge can be soaked in the solution. The juice of half a lemon or 1 tbs. of

vitamin C powder can be used instead of vinegar.

**F**or yeast infections you can also try the following remedies:

- ★ **Yogurt or Acidophilus tablets:** You want your vagina to favor the growth of friendly bacteria called lactobacillus bacteria. These friendly bacteria create an acidic environment in the vagina by turning sugars into lactic acid. Yeasts hate acidic environments because they can't grow there. Buy the tablets without sugar such as Swiss Herbal. At bedtime insert one tablet high in the vagina and one near the vaginal entrance. For mild yeast infections don't use too much lactobacillus. A lactobacillus overgrowth could result causing an itchy discharge. The yeast infection may have cleared up, but now you have another itch and treatment will have to start from scratch. To control the growth of bacteria alternate lactobacillus tablets with vinegar douches for several days.
- ★ **Yogurt or Cottage Cheese:** Yogurt is a soothing douche or can be spooned into the vagina. A poultice of natural cottage cheese can be spread on a menstrual pad to help alleviate itching.
- ★ **White oak or bayberry tea:** Add 1 tsp. bayberry bark and 1 tsp. white oak bark to a pint of boiling water. Let solution steep until lukewarm. Strain and douche with this once or twice daily or take a sitz bath with this tea.

- ★ **Juniper:** Soak a handful of juniper berries in water overnight. Add the berries to 1 quart of boiling water and let simmer for 1/2 hour. Let cool and then strain and use liquid as a douche. This seems helpful for diabetic women who have a hard time getting rid of yeast infections, as the yeast thrives on the excess sugar in their systems.
- ★ **Boric Acid:** Put the boric acid powder into a gelatin capsule. Use as an overnight suppository for 1-3 days.
- ★ **Nyastatin:** often prescribed by doctors, an anti-fungal cream that kills the yeast in the vagina. It is expensive and messier than most home remedies. If yeast can be treated in the early stages the expense of medications can be avoided.

**F**or trichomonas the following remedies may be helpful

- ★ **Goldenseal/Myrrh Douche:** To 1 pint boiling water add 1 tbs. myrrh, 1tbsp goldenseal and 1 tsp. bayberry bark. Let steep for twenty minutes. Strain mixture and douche when cool. Use twice daily for one or two weeks.
- ★ **Chickweed Douche:** Boil 1 quart of water. Remove from heat and add 3 tbs. chickweed. Cover and let sit for five to ten minutes. Strain and douche daily for one week.
- ★ **Garlic suppositories:** Insert a new clove every 12 hours for three to five days. See notes on insertion on previous page.

- ★ **Ointments:** Goldenseal and comfrey are both available as ointments. Thuja, a fungicide that is supposed to kill trichomonas comes in an ointment as well. Smear ointments on a tampon and insert vaginally or spread the ointment with your fingers inside the vagina and around the lips of the vulva.

**F**or gardnerella try the following remedies:

- ★ **Garlic suppositories and vinegar douches:** Insert garlic in the morning. Discard that evening and replace with another clove. Next morning remove garlic and use a vinegar douche to balance the pH of the vagina. Continue to use the garlic suppositories overnight and a vinegar douche in the morning for seven to ten days.
- ★ **Comfrey:** Mix equal parts of comfrey leaves, goldenseal powder, chamomile and sage. Steep 1 level tsp. of the mixture in 1 quart of boiling water for twenty minutes. Cool, strain and use as a douche solution once or twice a day for three to five days.

**T**here are many other natural treatments for vaginal infections. For further information see The Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine.