

THE KNOWLEDGE

Sexual Health

from emotion-related sexual health problems can benefit from Shirodhara as this treatment works at the emotional level along with changes in the endocrine system.

HERBS

Certain herbs also help to nourish the reproductive tissues resulting in improved sexual health. Shatavari (*asparagus racemosus*) is the herb of choice for women and helps to rejuvenate and nourish the reproductive system. This is also a natural aphrodisiac for women.

Ashwagandha (*withania somnifera*) is the herb of choice for men to help strengthen and nourish the reproductive system. This is also a natural aphrodisiac for men. According to Ayurveda it is known to help people suffering from premature ejaculation, impotence, erectile dysfunction and weakness in the tissues.

Other herbs and spices that may help strengthen the reproductive tissues are Turmeric, Triphala, Pippali (long pepper), cardamom and flowers of jasmine.

YOGA

Regular practice of Sun Salutations helps to regulate and strengthen the hormonal systems of the body by improving blood circulation to the reproductive area. Sun salutations are usually followed by moon salutations as this sequence helps to improve flexibility of the body therefore improving nervous impulses and transmission. This sequence also helps to get rid of excess heat in the body which may be a cause of impotence and low sperm count.

Shavasana or the corpse position is one of the best practices that will help not only to relieve stress and anxiety but it also helps to produce endorphins that help to nourish the reproductive system. This practice also helps to energise and refresh the body and mind and gets rid of tiredness and lethargy.

LIFESTYLE

Ayurveda talks about avoiding sexual practice under following circumstances:

- Immediately after meals
- Under heavy intoxication
- During menstrual period bleeding
- When the bladder is full
- In very hot weather.

Conversely, integrate the following into daily practice:

- Oil application to body after yoga followed by a shower
- Consuming warm milk at bedtime with Shatavari (for women) and Ashwagandha (for men).



WHEN THE CHEMISTRY ISN'T RIGHT...

by SARAH BROOKS

While consumers are increasingly asking for natural skincare products, health professionals should also carefully advise on products applied to delicate mucous membranes for sexual intimacy.

The tissues of the vaginal area more easily absorb chemicals than skin and are more likely to be irritated and damaged. Yet intimacy products such as personal lubricants and vaginal moisturisers can include various synthetic chemical irritants.

Medication can damage the specialised tissues too. How many women have had a course of antibiotics only to get Thrush as a result? Being on the Pill often causes vaginal dryness and a chemically-based lubricant can cause vaginal irritation.¹

So the question is how to help your pharmacy customers navigate this little discussed and very private minefield?

Customers wishing to avoid irritating the vagina and surrounding tissues might want to avoid intimacy products that contain glycerine, glycols and Nonoxonyl-9, the parabens (methyl, propyl, ethyl, isobutyl) and synthetic fragrances.

The alternatives are certified organic plant ingredients such as Aloe Vera, Guar, Locust Bean and Flax plus oils like Sweet Almond, Shea Butter and Sunflower.

Apart from the ingredients, there are two other important factors to consider when helping customers with intimacy products. The first is pH. A typical healthy vaginal environment is moist and acidic (low pH). An acidic environment around pH4 is microbicidal for many sexually transmitted diseases – the acidity kills microbes and prevents infections. This acidity is made by a naturally-occurring good bacteria population called lactobacillus. When this population is reduced or compromised it can struggle to make sufficient lactic acid to keep the pH low. Examples of troublesome microbes include *Candida albicans* (which causes Thrush²) and bacteria which cause Cystitis and Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)³.

BV is associated with a reduction in vaginal acidity – the pH rises towards pH7 or higher – and has been linked to an increased risk of STD transmission including HIV and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

The important point here is that women should keep their vaginal pH acidic to protect their sexual health and therefore choose an intimacy product that states it is pH buffered to match vaginal pH.

The second important factor is osmolality, a measure of the osmotic strength of the product, i.e. the strength of a liquid to pull water through a membrane like a cell wall. Intimate lubricants with a high value (hyperosmotic) can pull so much water out of surrounding tissues that they irritate the mucous membranes. The problem is that osmolality is rarely mentioned on the product label.

Glycerine, glycols and sugar are the main ingredients in hyperosmotic lubricants. Glycerine on skin is good, but a different matter on the unprotected mucosa (glycerine suppositories work so well because they irritate the mucosa to get everything moving).

Typical human cell osmolality is between 200-400 mOsm, and ideally a lubricant should not exceed 400 mOsm/kg to minimise tissue irritation. It is important for manufacturers to ensure that all water-based products are specifically designed to match vaginal pH and osmolality.



Sarah Brooks is a chemist who has worked in the Drug Safety divisions of major pharmaceutical companies. She is Director – Lubricant Safety at the Yes Yes Company Ltd which she formed in 2003 with colleague Susi Lennox to research and develop side effect-free intimacy products. For information on the Yes range of certified organic lubricants: www.yesyesyes.org or call 08456 44 88 13

For patients with sexual health issues, I strongly recommended consultation with a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner, bearing in mind that the Ayurvedic protocol may change based on a person's health or disease state.

■ **More information on Ayurvedic training: Ayurveda Pura Ltd, Email: info@ayurvedapura.com, www.ayurvedapura.com, tel: 0208 312 8383**

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