

Are You Looking After Your Vagina?

Find out how to keep things in tip top shape down there



The vagina is a sensitive and delicate thing, and when our intimate health isn't up to scratch, chances are we won't be feeling too great either. Plus, it's a pain to have to keep going to the doctor's and hang your legs in stirrups while a stranger pokes around in places you'd really rather they didn't.

Although it's really important to always get checked out if something doesn't feel quite right, you'll be pleased to know that there are steps you can take to keep your vagina happy and minimise the risk of problems. Dr Ejikeme, medical director at Adonia Medical and Aesthetic Clinic, reveals the key ways to look after your intimate health.

Hygiene

- 1.** Don't douch or use scented creams or soaps inside the vagina. These can change its pH and alter the balance of good bacteria which may lead to an increase in yeast infections. All it needs is a rinse with plain warm water – it's very good at looking after itself!
- 2.** Always wipe from front to back as doing it the other way round can move bacteria from the back passage towards the vagina, creating a risk of infection and cystitis.
- 3.** Opt for cotton underwear and try not to wear anything when you sleep to give your vagina space to breathe. The best environment for it is one that's clean and dry.

Sex

- 1.** Women have a short urethra and after we've had sex bacteria can work its way up to the bladder leading to a urine infection. Having a wee flushes it out so try to go to the loo as soon as possible.
- 2.** Don't ignore post-coital bleeding, as although this can be normal, it should be treated with suspicion. It could be a sign that your endometrial lining is thickening or your cervix is bleeding.
- 3.** Don't put up with pain during or after intercourse. It's more common than you might think and can be caused by a number of things, such as vaginal dryness and fibroids, most of which are treatable.

If you are experiencing either of these problems then make an appointment to see a GP or gynaecologist.

Diet

- 1.** Make sure you are drinking enough water, as the vagina has a self-cleaning mechanism and staying hydrated is key for enabling the body to self-regulate.
- 2.** Maintain a healthy, balanced diet with lots of fruit and vegetables and minimal sugar. Yoghurt is a great food to eat to keep your vagina happy as the live cultures help to boost the good bacteria, or alternatively you can take a probiotic supplement.

Health

- 1.** Stay up to date with your smear tests – if you are aged between 25 and 49 you should be having one every three years and 50 to 64-year-old women need to be checked every five years.
- 2.** Keep an eye on your discharge. At different times of the month the texture may change, but if you notice a difference in colour or smell, or it looks unusual in any way, then seek medical advice as it could indicate that you are suffering from thrush or an STI.