

Sitz baths are either a tub or shallow bath of lukewarm/cool water that you can sit in. This is especially good if there is a lot of inflammation, irritation or itching. You can sit in the bath for 30–60 minutes twice a day, and preferably before bed to reduce the overnight itching. Soothing baths can be made with strained Calendula tea (1 tablespoon as a strong tea poured into the sitz bath) or strained oatmeal (50g). A Nettle tea sitz bath is good to reduce itching.

Vaginal and vulval irritants

These are possible irritants:

- perfumed toilet paper
- tampons
- soaps
- vaginal deodorants
- washing powders
- synthetic underwear
- sanitary napkins
- tight clothes
- spermicides, lubricants
- condoms
- shaving/waxing
- vaginal discharges

Internal treatment can be more complex, and if you are prone to other atopic conditions such as eczema, hayfever or asthma, you would be best to consult with a naturopath or herbalist. This would involve using herbs for immune regulation and reducing the allergic response.

Some dietary approaches may be helpful to reduce 'reactivity'. These include reducing wheat, gluten and dairy proteins in the diet. Nutrients such as Vitamin A & E, Omega 3 fish oils and zinc help tissue integrity and repair. Omega 3 oils are especially helpful for dermatitis.

Like prescribed medications natural therapies need to be used correctly. This means seeking advice from natural therapists or herbalists and using natural therapies only as directed. If you have a complex medical history it is best to seek help from a professional.

**Do not stop other medication
without seeking medical advice.**

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Website

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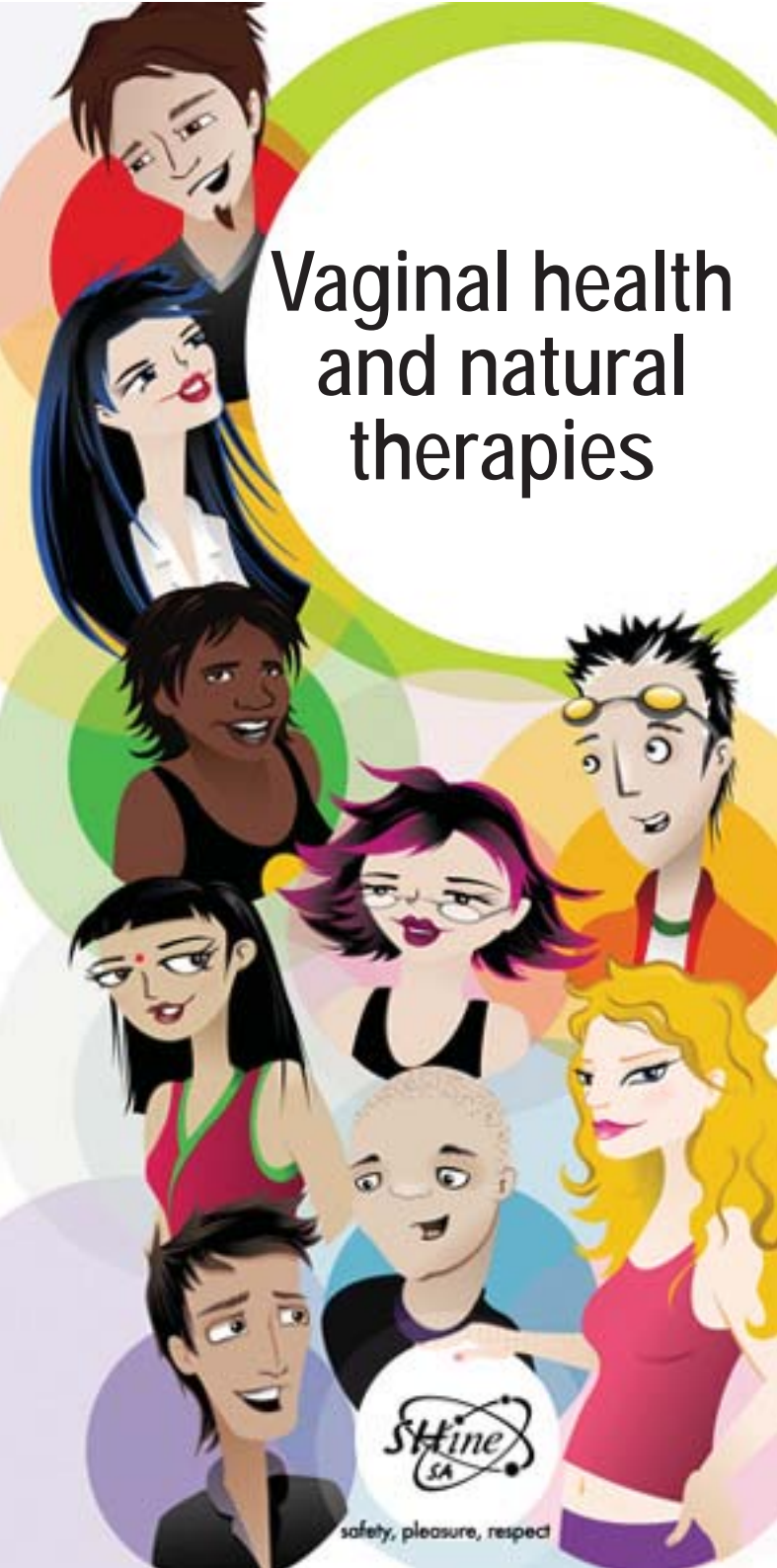
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Vaginal health and natural therapies



safety, pleasure, respect

Vaginal health problems can be quite common but difficult to talk about. Some problems may be short lived (acute) but many are long term (chronic) problems. This leaflet talks about some common vaginal health problems, such as atrophic vaginitis, bacterial vaginosis, recurrent candidiasis and vulval dermatitis. Some of these conditions may overlap.

Natural therapies can help with these problems but the condition is best diagnosed first by your health practitioner.

Atrophic vaginitis

Atrophic vaginitis is a specific condition mainly experienced by post-menopausal women. Women who have had treatments that lower their oestrogen, or women who have had chemotherapy or localised radiotherapy, may also experience atrophic vaginitis. Vaginal tissue is sensitive to oestrogen, so when these levels fall, vaginal tissue loses some of its elasticity and lubrication.

This thinning and shrinking of vaginal tissue leaves the vagina susceptible to soreness, irritation and infections. There may be burning and itching, and pain with sexual activity.

Natural therapies would include treatments to support the body's own production of oestrogen (after menopause) by using herbs such as Black Cohosh, Wild Yam or Soy.

Essential fatty acids such as Omega 3, Vitamin E and zinc are nutrients that support vaginal tissue strength and repair.

Topical treatments include herbal menopause creams that contain Black Cohosh, Calendula pessaries to reduce irritation, and a nutrient-rich cream containing Vitamin E and almond oil.

Pessaries are made by setting herbs in glycerine or cophia. These are then inserted, like suppositories, into the vagina. They then slowly melt and coat the vagina.

Bacterial vaginosis

Bacterial vaginosis is a broad term used to describe a vaginal infection by bacteria, most commonly *Gardnerella Vaginalis*. Other infectious vaginitis can occur from a yeast infection (candidiasis), or from the protozoan *Trichomonas Vaginalis* (trichomoniasis).

Bacterial infections can be the result of changes in the normal balance of healthy organisms or flora in the vagina. This can occur when the normal vaginal pH is changed during and before menstruation, with vaginal atrophy, and by the overgrowth of *Candida Albicans*.

Bacterial infections can also occur if you are generally run down or under stress, or if your immune system is compromised. *Gardnerella* can become a chronic infection if left untreated.

You may not experience any symptoms with a bacterial infection, although a discharge is common, usually with some smell. There may be also be soreness and itchiness.

Natural therapies aim to support the immune system with herbs such as Echinacea and Astragalus. There are also herbs such as Siberian Ginseng that help the body cope with increased stress.

Topical treatments are mainly antimicrobial herbs and herbs that soothe inflamed tissue. Herbs can be applied as a wash or cream or inserted as a pessary. In general any infectious vaginitis will need to be treated with pessaries and washes.

Golden Seal and Calendula pessaries are very good, as are tea tree oil pessaries, and should be used on alternate days for 3 weeks. Do not use pessaries when you are menstruating. Pessaries are usually available from naturopaths and herbalists or specialist herbal or homeopathic dispensaries.

Tea Tree oil can also be used as a wash but MUST be diluted, and a test patch tried first in case you are sensitive to it. Use a 5% dilution in warm water and shake well.

Washes are best used in a nozzled bottle so that you can 'irrigate' the vaginal area. Calendula and Golden Seal can also be used as a wash. Make a strong tea and strain before using.

Vaginal candidiasis

Vaginal candidiasis is the result of infection with *Candida Albicans* (a yeast) that can be acute, or recurrent and chronic. Acute candida typically has a cottage cheese like discharge with itchiness and irritation. Recurrent candidiasis may not have the typical candida discharge, and may have more non specific symptoms of irritation and inflammation.

It is important to restore the balance of flora in the vaginal environment by using Acidophilus (*Lactobacillus Acidophilus*). This can help prevent the recurrence of infection. Vaginal suppositories or pessaries are available, or you can make a paste to apply from a half teaspoon of Acidophilus powder in a dessertspoon of yoghurt. Other topical treatments are the same as for bacterial vaginosis.

In recurrent candidiasis it is also important to take Acidophilus internally. Dietary changes such as reducing sugar can influence chronic vaginal candida. Immune system support with immune regulating herbs is also helpful, as well as specific anti-candida herbs such as Pau d'Arco.

Stress can also play a part in these chronic infections, so appropriate stress management and the use of stress modulating herbs is indicated.

Vulval dermatitis

Dermatitis is a common cause of itching and irritation of the vulvovaginal region. Like any rash, it may have different causes. These include general skin allergy, contact allergy, concurrent infections and topical steroid cream use. Concurrent candida infection is very common.

Dermatitis is usually itchy, and there can be scaly or rough skin, split skin, soreness and swelling. Dermatitis is like an overreaction of the skin, so a natural therapy approach would aim to reduce general skin reactivity as well as localised inflammation.

The easiest treatment is to remove the offending irritant if the cause is from a contact allergy. Check the following list of irritants and be aware there may be a number of triggers.

Sitz baths, creams and washes are the best topical treatments for dermatitis. Calendula cream is soothing and repairs split tissue. If the tissue is deeply split and bleeding, a thick ointment like paw paw ointment is excellent. Chickweed cream is a gentle cream that is used for itchy eczema, and is good to reduce itching.

A Chamomile and Calendula wash made from a strong strained tea is very good for irritation and itchiness.