

# Sexual healing

**We take a look at a range of vitamins, supplements and herbs to help with sexual health and libido**

## An intimate issue

"Vaginal dryness, also known as vaginal atrophy or atrophic vaginitis, is a common and distressing condition which afflicts many women in the course of their lives, causing embarrassment and, at times, extreme physical discomfort," explains Susi Lennox, co-founder of The Yes Yes Company Ltd ([www.yesyesyes.org](http://www.yesyesyes.org)).

Vaginal tissue is kept moist, elastic and comfortable by lubrication which is naturally created by glands at the neck of the womb, and governed by the body's production of oestrogen. When oestrogen production is disrupted, which can happen for a number of reasons, the vagina can feel itchy, dry and irritated. The resulting discomfort can be debilitating, and impact the ease and pleasure of sex, and even affect day-to-day comfort.

The commonest cause of a decrease in oestrogen levels is the menopause, which leads to a thinning of the vaginal tissues and a reduction in the number of lubricating glands. In time, the vagina can become drier, shorter and less supple. For some women, these changes may occur without causing particular discomfort, while for others, distressing symptoms may develop. For women who are experiencing vaginal dryness but are not perimenopausal, there are many other possible causes. These include childbirth and its aftermath, hormone treatments, such as HRT and contraceptives, illness such as cancer and its treatments, medications such as anti-depressants, reaction to substances such as nicotine and alcohol or intolerance to harsh soaps used in the vulvar area.

If enough lubrication is not being naturally produced by a woman's own body, she can ease the dryness and relieve the discomfort with the use of a commercially available water-based intimate lubricant or vaginal moisturiser. In choosing a product for this sensitive area, care is needed in finding a natural product that is soothing, kind and rapidly effective."

## Vitamins for va va vroom!

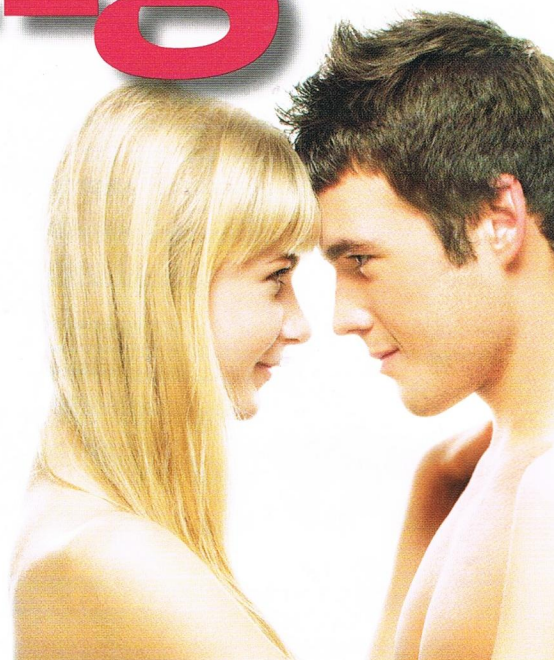
"There are many vitamins, minerals and supplements that support sexual health and libido in men and women," says nutritionist Marisa Peer ([www.marisapeer.com](http://www.marisapeer.com)). "For men, zinc boosts testosterone and increases sperm count. It also enhances the immune system and boosts sex drive. Foods rich in zinc are prawns, chicken, steak, eggs, sesame seeds and peanut butter. Vitamin E is known as a 'sex vitamin' because it aids in the production of sex hormones increasing attraction, mood, desire and energy, so be sure to stock up on vitamin E-rich blueberries, broccoli and eggs."

Marisa also recommends foods rich in the B vitamins to boost libido. She says: "Avocado is rich in B6, whereas eggs are full of vitamins B5 and B6, which help to decrease stress and balance hormone levels. Folate is a B vitamin that helps increase the production of histamines in your body. Histamines are the neurotransmitters that are significant to your body's production of an orgasm."

## Healing herbs

"Loss of libido is usually connected with stress so taking steps to reduce it and get enough sleep is very important," says Drew Price, a registered nutritionist with No 1 Boot Camp ([www.no1bootcamp.com](http://www.no1bootcamp.com)). "A healthy, balanced diet and regular exercise are vital. Avoiding too much sugar, eating a range of different vegetables, getting the proper intake of essential fats and decent protein are all good steps to take.

For men, arginine is an amino acid



involved in the production of nitric oxide which helps with the dilation of blood vessels. In terms of herbs, ginkgo is good as it aids circulation and keeps the blood vessels healthy. There are a range of adaptogens which can help the body to deal with stress, such as Korean ginseng, which also helps with erectile dysfunction, and maca which has aphrodisiac properties.

Vitex agnus-castus is said to work on the endocrine system and boosts the production of certain hormones. It can increase the amount of progesterone, which increases sexual desire, and reduce the amount of prolactin which can interfere with libido levels. These remedies will work with some people but not others, so I would recommend a consultation with a professional medical herbalist."

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