

What to eat for optimal vaginal health.



It seems we're hearing more about gut health than overall nutrition -- or the increasingly popular tracking macros -- as of late. With gut health inextricably linked to [hormones](#), playing a central role in estrogen levels, it's natural to wonder the lengths to which diet impacts menopause, and if even vaginal health can even be swayed by nutrition.

The short answer is yes. Nutrition -- beyond the infamous UTI cranberry juice -- can bring greater wellness, and improve conditions, related to the vagina. Improving life overall. As trend forecasting company WGSN anticipated, "The vagina has come back into focus, not only how to groom it and present it, but how we look after it." Start making your grocery list.

pH Balance

When the vagina's pH balance is off, bacterial and fungal infections can wreak havoc. For healthy bacteria growth, and the prevention of toxic microbes, this moderately acidic organ functions best with a pH ranging between 3.8 and 4.5. Probiotic foods, particularly those with lactobacillus acidophilus (which is naturally produced by the vagina), maintain and balance acidity and keep yeast from overgrowing. These fermented foods can also have wellness benefits -- such as bone strengthening from Vitamin K -- beyond healthy genitals:

- Yogurt/kefir
- Sauerkraut

- Pickles (with the exception of those produced in vinegar)
- Soy Products (tempeh, miso)
- Kimchi
- Kombucha

Prebiotics also reinforce healthy bacteria, regulating microflora and balancing vaginal pH. The downside? They can interfere with existing bowel issues, like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). As your digestion allows, enjoy leeks, onions, asparagus, garlic, oats, bananas, garlic, and whole wheat foods.

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) -- an infection that [affects nearly 1 in 3 women](#) has been [linked to poor nutrition](#). As BV spikes the vagina's pH and unhealthy bacteria takes over, the result is abnormal (often fishy) vaginal odor and discharge. [Research](#) reveals that diets in higher fat – [particularly saturated fat](#) that may increase vaginal pH – leads to higher frequency of BV. Meanwhile, diets with more protein, vitamins E and C, folic acid and calcium can lead to less severe effects of BV.

The Candida Diet, coined after Candida bacteria overgrowth responsible for yeast infections, centers around low-sugar, anti-inflammatory nutrition that reduces inflammation and deprives the Candida bacteria of the food it needs to thrive. Along with fermented foods (probiotics above) and healthy proteins consider these changes:

- Replace white flour with almond flour, coconut flour, or flax meal
- Eat non-starchy vegetables including beans (green, wax, Italian), broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, artichoke, asparagus, and eggplant
- Stick with low sugar fruits, such as blueberries, raspberries, strawberries
- Use non-glutinous (aka pseudo) grains like buckwheat, millet, and quinoa

Lemons (also a fruit, but great combined with water to hydrate) and [green tea](#), thanks to its antimicrobial effect, are also easy ways to maintain the vagina's healthy pH balance and decrease risk of infections. While cranberry juice is still renown for fighting infection-causing bacteria from sticking to your bladder wall's tissue, its sugar content is less than virtuous.

Lubrication

Depleted vaginal lubrication (often associated with menopause) can be offset with soy foods, thanks to their phytoestrogens. Savor non-processed foods such as edamame, tofu, tempeh, and miso.

Non-soy options that lubricate, as well as prevent itching and burning, include Avocados, flaxseeds, and despite [its cultural decline](#), Kale is recommended. Apples and water also enhance lubrication. "Hydration is key for overall health, but also for proper functioning of the vagina which has its own self-cleaning system. Adequate water intake will increase lubrication, allow secretions to be released and proper PH balance of vaginal tissues," according to Diana Hoppe, MD.

Circulation

Omega 3 fatty acids, long known as vital to our brain, heart, and skin, can also contribute to vagina health. Your choice of fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, oysters, herring, cavier) are rich in omega 3's. Not a fan? Sprinkle flax seeds, chia seeds or walnuts on your next meal to reap the benefits. If you like things spicy, indulge in hot chilies. Thanks to a chemical, [capsaicin](#), that stimulates nerves and improves blood circulation, they help with arousal.

Sexual Health

An apple a day is now tied to sexual satisfaction – more than keeping the doctor away – as it's phytoestrogens help getting aroused and having an orgasm easier, according to a [recent study](#).

[Dark chocolate](#) has also proven to boost libido. With an abundance of magnesium to sooth nerves and help muscle contractions, and the “feel good” chemical dopamine, it's no wonder it's considered an [aphrodisiac](#).

Foods rich with Vitamin C – citrus fruits, strawberries (which surprisingly have more vitamin C than oranges!), and bell peppers – can also enhanced stamina and sex drive.

Hormone Health

Vitamin A contributes to strong uterine walls, as well as encouraging hormone production to maintain our energy. [Sweet potatoes](#), rich in Vitamin A, have been linked to fertility and production of sex hormones, often recommended for women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

While there is a growing [\\$123 billion dietary](#) supplements market, food is always the best source for nutrition. "Lab formulations don't beat Mother Nature," reminds Jennie Ann Freiman, M.D.