

DO YOU KNOW YOUR VAGINA?

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When it comes to vaginal discharge, everyone wants to know if theirs is normal. Since every woman's vagina has a unique personality, you'll need to learn what's normal for you.

The vaginal mucus has a purpose: it makes it easier for sperm to swim to a woman's egg during ovulation, lubricates the penis during sex, and flushes out harmful microorganisms that can cause infection. It is comprised of shedded cells, healthy bacteria, proteins and mucus.

Vaginal secretions vary in color, appearance, consistency, amount and smell throughout a woman's life. What is normal in your twenties may not be normal in your fifties. Changes occur during the menstrual cycle, menopause, pregnancy and sexual arousal. And certain medications, douches, soaps, medical conditions, allergies and birth control pills can also affect the characteristics of vaginal secretions.

Any woman who has experienced a vaginal infection knows that it can be unpleasant. If you have bacterial vaginosis, yeast (Candida), trichomoniasis or any other sexually transmitted infection you want to know as soon as possible. Familiarizing yourself with the characteristics of your vaginal discharge on any given day can help you know when things are not right.

So wash your hands, give yourself some good light and explore.

Color

If discharge is clear or milky white, that's normal. It can also look very pale yellow when it's dried. If you are seeing grey, green, yellow, pink or red, that's not. Blood-tinged mucous may be a sign of pregnancy.

Scent

If it has a mild musky scent or none at all, that's normal. If it suddenly smells foul or "fishy," that's not.

Consistency

The texture of discharge will depend if you are ovulating or sexually aroused. If it feels sticky and can be stretched between two fingers during ovulation, or watery other times, that's normal. If it looks clumpy like cottage cheese, or foamy, that's not.

Amount

The amount of discharge is also variable. It will be more voluminous during sexual arousal

and during ovulation; less during menopause. Keep an eye out for big changes such as suddenly needing to wear a panty liner every day. It is normal to experience vaginal dryness during menopause, when waning estrogen causes less mucus to be produced.

Feel

Changes in your normal vaginal secretions that are accompanied by itching, redness, soreness, rash, burning or pain can be a sign you have a vaginal infection or an allergy to sperm or spermicidal, or a signal that there is some other medical problem.

Here are some pointers from the Dr. Oz team that can help keep your vagina healthy:

- * Clean daily using a mild soap and water
- * Dry yourself well after bathing or swimming
- * Don't douche, use perfumed sprays or talcum powder
- * Wear loose clothing at night or go commando
- * Avoid constricting clothing
- * Avoid panties made with synthetic fibers
- * Eat probiotics or take supplements to keep normal bacteria in balance, particularly during a course of antibiotics
- * Wipe from front to back to avoid contaminating the vagina with feces

After natural childbirth, does the vagina return to its original state or does it get stretched out?

If you had a really traumatic childbirth, there could be some injury to the vagina and some stretching. But, the vagina is resilient, and what sex therapist Dr. Laura Berman refers to as a "potential space" - it can expand to deliver a baby and contract. Focus on strengthening the vaginal muscles through Kegel exercises. Work on your core to strengthen the muscles of your pelvic floor; yoga and pilates are exercises that help to strengthen the core.

Can a couple be "incompatible" when it comes to size?

The average length of a vagina is about 3-4 inches. The vagina can expand to accommodate a penis up to 9 inches long. It's important that the vagina stays elastic and is sufficiently lubricated during intercourse.

What is the #1 issue women have with the vagina?

According to sex expert Dr. Laura Berman, it's genital self-image. Starting at a very early age, women are bombarded with messages about what their genitals are "supposed" to look and smell like. According to Dr. Berman, women who have a positive genital self-image are 6 times more likely to have ever been sexually satisfied. Genital self-image contributes to overall body image; those who have poor genital self-image issues can become sexually inhibited.

<http://www.doctoroz.com/videos/do-you-know-your-vagina-0>