



The Yeast of Your Worries!

A Yeast Infection Survival Handbook



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A zine for those seeking a second opinion.

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Why a Zine about Yeast Infections?



Why a Zine about yeast infections? You don't have to sit in front of the television for too long before you see an advertisement for Monistat or another Yeast Infection (YI) medication. Yeast Infections are apprehended as pesky, embarrassing, inconveniences that our culture attempts to shut up as quickly as possible.

The idea for this zine came to me after I suffered through four Yeast Infections in one year and tried, quite literally, everything. The experience, in hindsight, was a blessing in disguise: the resilience and strength of my Yeast Infections, which were unaffected by medications like Monistat and aggravated by prescription oral treatments like Diflucan and Metronidazol, pushed me to seek out a Naturopathic Doctor, research about Yeast Infections on my own, and start focusing my attention away from pills and toward subtle lifestyle changes.

My yoni and I are better friends now. I hope that this guide helps those who are burdened with Yeast Infections and

those who just want to learn more about them. (And here's a shout out to all of the men picking up this zine!)

Please note that this zine is not a medical text intended to offer diagnosis or to promise cures. (In other words, don't sue me if all that douching with garlic and vinegar does for your Yeast Infection is make your yoni smell like salad dressing!) Also note that I advise against diagnosing yourself: it is possible that you have something other than a Yeast Infection caused by Candida, and going to the gynecologist for a pap smear will help you identify the cause of your symptoms. Every body is different, and "results" are not guaranteed.

Rather, understand this guide to be an exploration of one woman's trials, tribulations, and discoveries. I am honored to share my experiences and my findings with you and with the vagina(s) in your life. Enjoy!

Namaste,
Erica.



1

Why Me, Why Me?

Where Yeast Infections Come From



Yeast and other bacteria are normal and in fact necessary in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract and in the vagina. Bacteria and fungi decompose dead tissue and other material that the body cannot use. When yeast gets overfed, however, it begins to overpopulate and outnumber the other bacteria in the body, compromising the harmony of the system. Yeast Infections are usually caused by the rapid growth of a bacterium called *Candida albicans*. The majority of triggers that spark the overgrowth of yeast have to do with lifestyle:

Broad-Spectrum

Antibiotics: Antibiotics indiscriminately kill bacteria in the system, including the “good” bacteria. This upsets the balance of the vaginal “ecosystem,” making it easy for yeast to run

the show. Yeast Infections can also be caused by anti-bacterial soap, so you may want to clean your yoni (and your menstrual cup, diaphragm, and other similar devices) with mild, un-scented, non-anti-bacterial products. Low levels of antibiotics are also found in commercial meat, dairy, eggs, and poultry. If you have to take antibiotics, be sure to supplement your system with acidophilus and alkalizing foods (see the “Feed Yourself, Mama” chapter for more information).

Tight, Synthetic Clothing: Synthetic clothes (like pantyhose, polyester, and bathing

suits) trap heat and moisture in the crotch, creating the perfect environment for yeast to grow. If you wear underwear, try to only wear cotton, and if the clothes near your yoni ever get



wet (like if you're in a wet bathing suit, for example), change into something dry. When you have a YI, change your underwear regularly, as yeast can live in the fabric.

Chemicals and Douching: Inks, dyes, and perfumes all upset the balance of the vaginal flora. These products kill off the bacteria in the yoni, leaving the system imbalanced and susceptible to infections. Chemicals can be found in perfumed toilet papers, conventional douches, underwear, perfumed laundry detergents, and scented soaps.

Sugar and Acid: As addressed in the "Feed Yourself, Mama" chapter, a huge cause of YI's (perhaps the main cause, even) pertains to diet. Sugars and acidic foods are what yeast thrive on; diets high in sugars and acids are diets that are great for getting YI's.

Hormones: Pregnant women often get YI's, as do those women who take contraceptive pills and steroids. Long-term unnatural stimulation of the hormonal system irritates the liver and pancreas, and these organs are essential to keeping the digestive tract healthy and balanced.

Irritation of the Vaginal Membranes: This is caused by sexual activity that occurs when the vagina is not secreting its natural lubricant. Don't be shy about using lubricant when you need it, but be sure to check out the "I Just

Wanna Make Love to You" section for a heads-up about selecting lubricants.

Weakened Immune System: Those with weak immune systems (due to HIV, cancer, herpes, hepatitis and other diseases) are more susceptible to picking up infections such as Yeast Infections. But simple matters like stress and sleep deprivation take their toll on the immune system, too.

Diabetes: Because diabetics grapple with keeping their blood sugar in check, they are at high risk of YI's. As stated above, YI's have a lot to do with sugar, and when a Diabetic's blood sugar is high, there is more sugar available to yeast, and the body's naturally occurring defense is decreased. This makes it easier for the yeast to multiply in the yoni of a woman with diabetes than in the vagina of a woman that does not have diabetes.

Disabilities: Women whose disabilities require that they spend much of their time in wheelchairs are also susceptible to YI's. Sitting keeps the vagina warm and damp, providing the perfect environment for yeast to get out of control. Plastic and other synthetic chairs do not absorb perspiration, leaving the moisture in the underwear. If you live with disabilities that require that you use a wheelchair, try putting some lamb's wool or another natural fiber over the bottom of the chair, and wash and dry the vaginal area often.

2

The Wise Woman: My Body, My Emotions



We are spirits harnessed in physical forms. It is no wonder, then, that our health relies on more than just how we treat our bodies: health is also controlled by how we treat ourselves, how we are emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

Every two and a half minutes, someone is sexually assaulted somewhere in America [statistic from RAINN (Rape Abuse Incest National Network) website]. One in four girls/women and one in seven boys/men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. How many women do you know, counting yourself?

It took me a long time before I realized that something that happened to me when I was sixteen was sexual assault. I had been storing this anger and pain in my body that whole time, and it would creep up on me every now and then, and I wouldn't know what it was or where it was coming from. The year of the recurring Yeast Infections, I would cry every time I went to the gynecologist, be-

cause I hated the way I felt when I left his office: dirty, whore-ish, violated. I wanted to shut down sexually that year; I wanted to stop thinking of myself as a creature vested with sexuality.

That spring I went on a backpacking trip and wilderness therapy excursion to Canyonlands National Park, in the desert of Utah. My partner led the trip as his senior project for school, and one of the set activities was a walking meditation in the desert. We woke early that morning and ate breakfast in silence. Filing into a single line, we followed one another, walking



silently, slowly, consciously over the sand and cacti. It didn't take long before I ventured away from the group, walking slowly, slowly. I entered a trance-like state, walking into the morning sun, wanting to be ravished by its intense heat. I revisited a memory from when I was eighteen... In this memory I was visiting a friend who

tried to violate me as I slept. The next morning I went for a hike by myself, and got my period in the middle of the woods. I experienced intense menstrual cramps, and had to use my cellphone to call the forest service to come carry me out of the woods. As I lay in the middle of the trail, screaming with pain, a single beam of sunlight penetrated the canopy and fell on my face. It was warm and soothing. I can't remember if I passed out or not, but by the time the forest ranger found me and roused me, I could walk on my own...

As I walked through the desert that day on my silent walking meditation, I wanted the sun to do what it had done for me that day that I was stranded in the forest. I wanted it to take away my pain, to release me from something holding me down, suppressing me, restraining me, violating me. But then I realized: I hadn't been ready prior to this day to let the pain go. I hadn't been ready to acknowledge it, which meant that I hadn't been ready to release it. As my eyes became blinded with tears, I lost complete sense of where I was, walking, slowly, into the sun. I thought of the Yeast Infections, of the professor who had recently come onto me. I thought of the time I was eighteen in the woods, of the time I was sixteen. I thought of my painful periods, of my shame, of my shame. I thought of my anger for being ashamed, my anger at letting myself be violated. I thought of the gynecologist.

Something happened that afternoon that I still have not been able to eloquently explain. The only word for the experience, as mundane as it may sound, is "religious." I shared my findings with the group, which

was hard, seeing as how of the seven people on the trip, five were men. But sharing with the group made me confront my findings. I fell asleep on a rock, in the sun, and everyone else went exploring.

I woke up to my partner calling my name, telling me to follow him. Tired, I obliged, and he led me to the rest of the group. They had discovered the site of a former Anasasi village. Two shelters and a food storage where all that remained. Outside of the food storage we found pieces of obsidian, a sharp rock often used for cutting, in the sand. One of the members of the group found a puma skull. It was a truly magical day.

Two weeks later, I was back in the city, working in the darkroom. My partner called me and told me to come outside for my birthday present. He handed me a piece of the obsidian we had found in the desert, bound in metal and crafted into a pendant. I wear the pendant around my neck, and carry it on me as a reminder of my sexual rebirth, knowing that many of my physical ailments can be in part remedied by acceptance.

That being said, I think that part of why women get YI's may have something to do with suppressed pain. I ask my sisters reading this zine to love themselves, to accept themselves, and to reach out to others so that we may hold each other in a latticework of love and acceptance. If you have a gynecologist who doesn't treat you as a human being (as opposed to a yoni with a number), find another one. Surround yourself with people and things that empower your beautiful self.

3

Feed Yourself, Mama: The Diet for Women Fighting Yeast Infections



You are what you eat. Or, rather, your yoni is what you eat. If you are a woman who is prone to getting YI's, or if you currently have one, then put aside your notions of "Oh, I'm being so baaad – this is going to go straight to my hips!" and instead think of it this way: "This chocolate bar is going to go straight to my cooch." The suggestions following, furthermore, are preventative measures as much as they are treatments. Because of the frequency of the YI's I was getting, I permanently changed my eating habits, and have found that this has really helped prevent YI's. Obviously a diet that strictly follows the suggestions below would be rather hard to keep, but it's been pretty easy to avoid sweets, baked goods, and even bread. But play around, and see what works for you.

Addressing your diet may be something that is emotionally challenging: a lot of women carry great shame when it comes to how and what they eat. Don't do anything that you are not comfortable with. You might want to go see a nutritionist, or take small steps in changing your eating habits, instead of radically changing everything at once. Abstaining from sweets, for me, has helped me examine how I abuse myself with food and how I use it to unhealthily comfort myself.



The Diet for a New Vagina!

DEMON NUMBER ONE: SUGAR

Yeast thrives in sugar, and that being said, do not eat sugar when you have a YI. Period. Not even a little bit. It might just be the hardest thing you ever do: I know personally that I crave sweets more than usual when I have a YI. But by depriving your body of sugar, you quite literally starve the yeast out of your system. Although it might seem like a simple rule to follow, sugar is more than just the white crystals in your cupboard. Sugar is hiding in a lot of places that you might not have suspected, even under the guise of “healthy” foods, such as:

Natural Sweeteners: agave nectar, honey, brown sugar, maple syrup, Splenda, Sweet and Low, evaporated cane juice, brown rice syrup. It’s all sugar, honey-child. They might not be as “bad” as white table sugar, but they will nevertheless make yeast have a wild dance party in your yoni. Some say Stevia is okay, but I usually keep away.

Fruits: Fructose is a sugar, silly. (Useful tidbit: anything ending in -ose is a sugar. Malatose, fructose, lactose, etc.) Some would argue that all berries, pomegranates, lemons, and limes are okay in moderation.

Dairy and Animal Proteins: Lactose is sugar. Moldy cheeses are especially to be avoided, and if you absolutely must have dairy, make it goat’s milk or goat cheese.

- Note: There is one exception to the “no dairy” rule: yogurt. (see the “It’s Okay! There’s Still Plenty to Eat” section of this chapter for more information)

- Note: Animal proteins also include red meat, which promotes fungus growth.

Caffeine: That’s right, no coffee (including decaf), no tea (tisanes/herbal teas are okay), no chocolate (oh, fuck!), no soft drinks (or rather, in American: soda, in Canadian: pop).

- Side note about black tea: black tea reduces the body’s ability to absorb and retain iron. Iron is an important mineral for women, as we lose a lot of iron through the blood lost during menstruation. This is why women often crave chocolate because, aside from being a tasty comfort food, chocolate is high in iron. So if you’re on your moon and craving chocolate, try eating some spinach instead, because chocolate not only contains sugar, but caffeine too.

- Here’s why your body hates coffee, even decaffeinated coffee: Coffee gives a kick to the body’s hormones adrenaline and glucagon. These two hormones release stored sugar from the liver, which raises the body’s blood sugar. This is why you get a rush even from decaf. Caffeine aside, coffee gives you a sugar-high.

Say you can’t live without your early morning coffee? Okay, okay, here are two coffee alternatives. Please note that both of these alternatives are things that will aggravate a YI, but not as much as coffee will:

1. the super-sugar alternative: Put a tablespoon of black currant syrup (man, syrup, just saying that word gives me a sugar-rush) in a cup of hot water. The thick, black color of the drink will trick you into thinking you’re drinking coffee, even if you think you know better.

2. the slightly better alternative: Yerba Mate is a South American drink that has become commercialized and even trendy in North America. Although

it contains no “caffeine” per se, it is nevertheless full of natural stimulants and will give you a little buzz similar to that of coffee or tea. Mate Factor has manufactured a variety of flavors, and the Dark Roast flavor is the one most resembling the smell and taste of coffee.

Potatoes: Potatoes are super-starchy. Starches are among the fast-burning carbohydrates (fast-burning means it turns to sugar very quickly).

Refined and Complex Carbohydrates: white flour (any flour, really), white rice, cereals, pasta, instant/minute oats. Refined carbohydrates are fast-burning carbohydrates (meaning they quickly turn to sugar, as opposed to slow-burning carbohydrates, like vegetables and legumes). Whole grains like brown rice, wild rice (be careful with wild rice, because a lot of companies sell a wild rice blend, which is mainly white rice with a few grains of wild rice thrown into the mix), kamut, millet, buckwheat, barley, kasha, quinoa, and steel cut oats are all good substitutes for refined carbs.

DEMON NUMBERTWO: ACID

Yeast Infections are also caused and aggravated by acidic foods, because of the instability of the body’s pH. pH stands for “potential of hydrogen,” and it refers to the acidity or alkalinity of a solution. It is measured on a scale of 0 to 14 - the lower the pH the more acidic the solution, the higher the pH the more alkaline (or base) the solution. When a solution has a pH of 7 is it neutral, meaning it’s neither acidic or alkaline. Most people who suffer from unbalanced pH are acidic. When your system gets too acidic, your body is forced to borrow minerals (like calcium, sodium, potassium and magnesium) from

vital organs and bones to neutralize the acid. This strains the system, and can cause a number of undesirable ailments like YI’s. (see <http://www.trans4mind.com/nutrition/pH.html> for more information). Some popular acidic foods include (chart taken from The Wolfe Clinic Online):

ACIDIFYING FOODS:

FATS & OILS

- Avocado Oil
- Canola Oil
- Corn Oil
- Hemp Seed Oil
- Flax Oil
- Lard
- Olive Oil
- Safflower Oil
- Sesame Oil
- Sunflower Oil

FRUITS

- Cranberries

GRAINS

- Rice Cakes
- Wheat Cakes
- Amaranth
- Barley
- Buckwheat
- Corn
- Oats (rolled)
- Quinoa
- Rice (all)
- Rye
- Spelt
- Kamut
- Wheat
- Hemp Seed Flour

DAIRY

- Cheese, Cow
- Cheese, Goat

Cheese, Processed
Cheese, Sheep
Milk
Butter NUTS & BUTTERS
Cashews
Brazil Nuts
Peanuts
Peanut Butter
Pecans
Tahini
Walnuts

ANIMAL PROTEIN

Beef
Carp
Clams
Fish
Lamb
Lobster
Mussels
Oyster
Pork
Rabbit
Salmon
Shrimp
Scallops
Tuna
Turkey
Venison

PASTA (WHITE)

Noodles
Macaroni
Spaghetti

OTHER

Distilled Vinegar
Wheat Germ
Potatoes

DRUGS & CHEMICALS

Chemicals
Drugs, Medicinal
Drugs, Psychedelic
Pesticides
Herbicides

ALCOHOL

Beer
Spirits
Hard Liquor
Wine

BEANS & LEGUMES

Black Beans
Chick Peas
Green Peas
Kidney Beans
Lentils
Lima Beans
Pinto Beans
Red Beans
Soy Beans
Soy Milk
White Beans
Rice Milk
Almond Milk

OTHER DEMONS:

Other foods to watch out for besides sugars and acids:

Fungi: Mushrooms are the most commonly consumed fungus in Western culture.

Yeast: Although you're steering clear of bread, the main source of yeast, if you're a nutritional yeast fiend like I am (it's really yummy on popcorn with some dill, or mixed with olive oil and pasta to make vegan mac-and-cheese. I could go on, but then you might just go and eat some) then you might want to switch to Bragg's liquid aminos on your crunchy morsels.

Alcohol: Alcohol stimulates Candida growth, and because of the fermentation process of making alcoholic drinks, they are extremely high in sugar. It's also not such a great idea to be putting toxins into your system when it's working hard to fight off an infection, duh.



IT'S Okay! THERE'S STILL PLENTY LEFT TO EAT!

Although it sounds like everything you eat is now off-limits, believe it or not, there actually remain a number of things to eat (starving yeast doesn't have to entail starving your belly). An exhaustive list would comprise of many pages, but here are just some highlights. These foods are especially good for fighting Yeast Infections:

Garlic: Garlic is perhaps the cheapest anti-bacterial and anti-fungal remedy there is. It's also great for boosting immunity, and for overall giving your body the strength it needs to fight off infections. Oh yeah: and don't cook it,

because then you'll kill off it's "magick healing-ness."

Yogurt: Plain yogurt is really the only kind of yogurt to eat when you have a Yeast Infection, since flavored yogurts are high in sugar and will promote the growth of yeast. Yogurt is full of live and active cultures (namely *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *L. casei*, *L. reuteri* and *Bifidobacterium bifidum*). These "probiotic" bacteria pass through the stomach to the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. There, they help maintain a healthy balance of all the different kinds of bacteria that live there. They restore the "good" bacteria that comprise healthy vaginal flora, and when these bacteria are killed (by prescription YI medications, for example), YI's are more likely to recur.

Acidophilus: Speaking of the bacteria found in yogurt, you can give your system a big boost of "good" bacteria just by going out and buying a bottle of it. *Acidophilus* can be found in any pharmacy, but beware: most of the *Acidophilus* sold is dead, and therefore useless for fighting off a YI. A good *Acidophilus* is one that is refrigerated: if you find a bottle on a shelf in the pharmacy, don't buy it. Usually integrative pharmacies and health food stores will carry refrigerated *Acidophilus*, and you may even want to ask which ones are shipped refrigerated, if you're feeling really ambitious. Good (some say better) alternatives to *Acidophilus* are spore-based products like *L. sporogenes* and *B. laterosporus* (take once daily on an

empty stomach; twice if the infection is really severe).

Chlorophyll Rich Foods: Basically this refers to dark, leafy greens like kale and chard. They're purifying, and they stop the spread of bacteria. Seaweed is also good for rebuilding immunity and helping the body de-activate yeast.

Water: We're made of it, and it's great for flushing out toxins. Give it a sprin-

kle of some cayenne pepper for some extra de-toxifying properties.

Alkaline Foods: Eating alkaline foods (such as miso, tempeh, soysauce, raw sauerkraut, and raw kimchi) helps shift your body's pH and oxygenate your system, which helps your body naturally fight yeast. Other foods high in alkaline and low in sugar include (taken from The Wolfe Clinic Online – I've excluded sugary foods from the list):

ALKALIZING FOODS

VEGETABLES

Garlic
Asparagus
Fermented Veggies
Watercress
Broccoli
Brussel sprouts
Cabbage
Carrot
Cauliflower
Celery
Chard
Chlorella
Collard Greens
Cucumber
Eggplant
Kale
Kohlrabi
Lettuce
Mushrooms
Mustard Greens
Dulce
Dandelions
Edible Flowers
Onions
Peas
Peppers
Pumpkin
Rutabaga
Sea Veggies
Spirulina
Sprouts
Squashes
Alfalfa

Barley Grass
Wheat Grass
Wild Greens
Nightshade Veggies

FRUITS

Avocado
Lime
Lemon
Tomato

PROTEIN

Eggs
Whey Protein Powder
Cottage Cheese
Chicken Breast
Yogurt
Almonds
Chestnuts
Tofu (fermented)
Flax Seeds
Pumpkin Seeds
Tempeh (fermented)
Squash Seeds
Sunflower Seeds
Millet
Sprouted Seeds
Nuts

ORIENTAL VEGETABLES

Maitake
Daikon
Dandelion Root

Shitake
Kombu
Reishi
Nori
Umeboshi
Wakame
Sea Veggies

OTHER

Apple Cider Vinegar
Bee Pollen
Lecithin Granules
Probiotic Cultures
Green Juices
Veggies Juices
Mineral Water
Alkaline Antioxidant
Water
Green Tea
Herbal Tea
Dandelion Tea
Ginseng Tea
Banchi Tea
Kombucha

SPICES/SEASONINGS

Cinnamon
Curry
Ginger
Mustard
Chili Pepper
Sea Salt
Miso
Tamari

FUN, EASY TO PREPARE YONI-FRIENDLY RECIPES

Tzatziki Dip/Spread: (za-ZEE-kee)

Ingredients:

plain whole yogurt
chopped garlic
chopped cucumber (cut it up and press in paper towels, to get the water out)
finely chopped dill and/or mint.

Directions:

Mix it all up in a bowl. Yep. That's it.
Good dip for veggies.

Miso Soup:

Ingredients:

3 cups of water
2 tablespoons miso paste
three scallions or green onions, chopped
_ block silken tofu, cubed
2 carrots, chopped
_ teaspoon sesame oil

Directions:

Heat oil in bottom of small pot.
Add green onion and cook for about a minute, stirring frequently.
Add 2 1/2 cups water.
Dissolve miso in 1/2 cup water and add to pot.
Bring to a boil.
Lower heat, add tofu.
NOTE: you can also substitute the miso paste for coconut milk, and add some curry powder or a chili pepper and some celery for a Thai coconut soup! Yummy!

Tempeh Stir Fry:

Ingredients:

200g tempeh, cubed
2 tablespoons soy sauce or tamari
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
1 medium onion, chopped



2 carrots, chopped
1 red bell pepper, cut into strips or chopped
2 tablespoons of vinegar

Directions:

Steam tempeh for 10 minutes.
Mix tempeh with soy sauce and garlic and marinate for 1 hour.
Heat oil in a pan and add ginger and cook for 1 minute.
Add onion and carrots and stir-fry 6 minutes.
Add tempeh with its marinade and bell pepper.
Add the vinegar to the mixture. Bring to boiling point and cook for one minute.
Serve the stir-fried tempeh with brown rice.



A

Sleep!



Sleep is so important that it gets its own chapter, even though I have very little to say about it. Stress and sleep deprivation can increase your chances of getting a YI (and a number of other sicknesses).

Get plenty of rest when you're treating your YI or trying to dodge one, and put as much of your "stress" on hold as possible. Sleep is so sexy.

Mmmm...



5

*The Pet you Never Knew You Had:
Feeding and Cleaning Your Vagina, Sister!*

The best part about having a YI (I bet you didn't know there was a best part!) is that you get to reconnect with your body. If you aren't comfortable touch-

ing yourself, here is your chance to get to know the part of your anatomy that makes you a beautiful vessel for creating and carrying life.

REMEDIES:

I list a number of suggestions in this section, for a few reasons. Everybody and every body are different, and certain techniques will work better for some than for others. Also, a number of the techniques start getting pricey, so I've also included methods that you can make yourself. The main reason for the multiple suggestions, however, is because yeast are smart and they quickly adapt. If you're using one method, it may work at first but then once the yeast adapts and becomes immune to the treatment, you're back at the drawing board. I suggest using a combination of the below methods, alternating between them so that the yeast cannot keep up with your sneak-attacks. There are many more remedies than the ones listed here, but I've only chosen to share with you the remedies that I have tried myself.

Two Fingers in the Shower:

Perhaps the more graphic of the techniques outlined in this section, is it the most important in my opinion. The symptoms of a YI (burning, itching, tenderness, etc) are caused by the overgrowth of yeast in the vagina. The fastest way to help your body get over this overgrowth is to physically remove as much of the yeast as possible. Although this action by itself will not cure the infection, it will lead to immediate (but temporary) symptom relief, and will leave less yeast in your vagina for your body to fight. The technique is simple: while sitting on the toilet or standing in the shower with one foot on the edge of the tub, insert two fingers into the vagina and scoop out as much yeast as possible. How will you know if what you're touching is yeast? It's yeast. Pull

it out. Be sure to reach up as far back as possible: a lot of yeast likes to hide out near the cervix. Wash your hands thoroughly with hot water after removing the yeast.

Garlic: Take a clove of garlic, peel it, and poke some holes in it with a fork. Insert it into the vagina, as deeply as possible. Some women like to wrap the garlic in gauze because they think the garlic will burn the inner walls of the vagina, but I never do. If you are completely paranoid about being able to pull it out, you can poke a hole through it and tie a string to the garlic. But it isn't going to just float up into your body: when you want to remove it, just bear down (like you're making a bowel movement), and if the garlic doesn't slip out on its own, use one finger to push it out. Garlic is a great anti-fungal, it's cheap, and it soothes the itching and burning quite nicely. Plus, it leaves your yoni smelling like garlic bread.

Douching: Another personal favorite. Conventional douches are quite terrible for the health of the vagina, because they kill off the entire vaginal flora, leaving the vagina unarmed against future infections. This little home-made douche, however, will do you no harm. Take a douche bottle (if you don't have one, you can buy a store-bought douche or enema and clean the bottle out really well), and fill it with one part apple cider vinegar, three parts water, and three cloves of finely chopped garlic. Let it stand for 15 minutes or so, so the garlic juices can seep out into the liquid. Sitting on the toilet or standing in the shower, insert the nozzle into the vagina and squeeze the bottle, pushing the mix up into the vagina and letting it spill out on its own. If your vagina starts to

burn (which it will if the vagina is very irritated), you can do one of two things: douche with water, or turn on the bathtub faucet, and lie on your back in the tub, letting the water pour over the vulva until you don't feel like your yoni is on fire. Voila.

Tea Tree Oil Suppositories: You can find these refrigerated in health food stores and integrative pharmacies, and they usually run somewhere around \$20 for eight. Tea tree oil is very cooling, so the suppository should feel good. I think of tea tree suppositories as a vaginal cough drop. You know how when you breathe in through your nose when you have a Halls cough drop in your mouth and you feel so clear that you're almost cold? Yeah, like that, but in your vagina. Plus, tea tree oil is a natural antiseptic, germicide, antibacterial, and fungicide, so it will go right to work fighting that yeast. Be sure to keep the rest of the stash in the fridge, so they don't melt. By the way, a suppository is the same thing as a pessary (although you theoretically could put these in your bum, they won't help with the Yeast Infection). Use the suppositories at night before bed, and wear a pad or panty liner. You can also soak a tampon (use organic, natural cotton tampons, and change every 4-6 hours, please!) in tea tree oil and insert that too.

Yogurt: Some women put yogurt in their yonis with a teaspoon, holding open the walls of the vagina with a speculum (those metal duck lips that the gynecologist uses to hold open the inner walls of the vagina). Most women, however, don't just have speculums lying around. I recommend getting one of those popsicle freezer trays and making some yogurt popsicles. Because YI's are

usually very hot, the nice, cool yogurt popsicle will not only feel soothing, but will also prove to be an easier method of inserting yogurt into the vagina. The cultures in yogurt will go straight to work on those pesky yeast Gremlins. And then you can eat a yogurt popsicle when you're done – Yeehaw!

Boric Acid Powder: It's not just for cockroaches anymore. It's hard to find boric acid capsules, so you might have to buy a bottle of boric acid powder (it's under \$4) and some veggie capsules. Fill the capsules with the powder. In the morning, pop the top off of a capsule and insert into the vagina, as deep as you can. Wear a panty liner.

Acidophilus: You can either buy refrigerated Acidophilus (see the "Feed Yourself, Mama" section for more information) or buy Acidophilus vaginal suppositories. If you are using the capsules, pop the top off of one and slip into the vagina, as far back as possible. Wear a panty liner, and kept the rest of the supply refrigerated.

TIPS ON GENERAL HYGIENE:

Because your yoni is a gentle, sensitive part of your body, it is important to keep it clean. (The following tips will also prove helpful in preventing YI's in the first place.)

-Avoid harsh, perfumed, and anti-bacterial soaps in the vaginal area

-Wash your genitals frequently with warm water and gentle soap, and pat dry (make sure your vulva is totally dry, leaving the yeast with little moisture to

grow in)

- Use a clean towel or paper towel every time you dry your vulva after a shower, so as not to keep giving the yeast back to yourself by leaving it on your terry-cloth towels.

-Use unscented toilet paper free of inks and dyes.

-Avoid conventional douches like the plague.

-Wear cotton underwear, so that the natural fibers of the cotton will absorb any perspiration, wicking moisture away from the yoni.

-Change your underwear at least once a day when you have a YI, washing dirty undies in hot water. This way if any yeast gets into the fibers of your undies, you aren't stewing in it. Some women microwave their underwear to kill off the bacteria, but I prefer just to put them in the wash, as hot as possible.

-Wear loose, free-flowing pants or skirts. This will keep the vaginal area a little less warm and a little less moist.

- Always wash your hands thoroughly after touching your yoni.

-Wash all douche bottles (if you're using a natural douche like the one outlined in the "Treatments" section of this chapter), applicators, and other re-useable devices that are inserted into the vagina thoroughly in warm water and mild hand soap.

-If you get your period when you have a YI (which is actually good, because the yeast really doesn't like menstrual blood, and the blood also helps push a lot of it out), do not use tampons (and I wouldn't use a menstrual cup either). Home-made terrycloth pads are ideal, or you could use conventional pads. Either way, change them often.



6

I Just Wanna Make Love to You: Sex and Yeast Infections



ISSUES PERTAINING TO HETEROSEXUAL, VAGINAL SEX

Nonoxyl 9: Nonoxyl 9 is an ingredient in most spermicidal jellies, creams, and in some condoms. Although many (including my current gynecologist) say that there is no link between nonoxyl 9 and YI's, many women would argue the opposite. Whenever I use a spermicidal product, my vagina begins to feel dry and itchy, and I feel a burning that I can only compare to the feeling of a YI in

its earlier stages. I have never, however, developed an actual YI from using spermicide, but it certainly does irritate the gentle walls of the vagina. That being said, I wouldn't advise using nonoxyl 9 products if you already have a YI, but I can't claim that they cause YI's. (Keep reading for more info. about lube...)

Semen: Semen aggravates YI's. I've had little success in finding out exactly why, but if you are lucky enough to even want to have sex when you have a YI, be sure to use a condom or if you're on

the pill, you can also opt for the pull-out method.

Can Men Carry YI's? If a man does not thoroughly and properly clean his lingam (that's hippie talk for penis) after having intercourse with a woman who has a YI, he can technically transmit yeast to another woman. This, however, does not guarantee that the latter will get a YI; yeast colonization does not necessarily equal an infection. It is also possible that a woman with a Yeast Infection can give the yeast to her male partner, who can then transmit it back to her. So wash the shmeckies in your life!

INDISCRIMINATE ISSUES:

Oral Sex: If you are a woman performing oral sex on another woman who has a YI, you will not get a vaginal YI. Although having the yeast in your mouth may give you oral thrush, this, generally speaking, is usually only a problem for those who have low immunity, such as people living with HIV or AIDS.

Sex Toys: Clean all sex toys thoroughly, in hot water and hand soap. Silicone toys can be set in boiling water for two minutes, or run through the dishwasher. Rubber toys, however, trap dirt rather easily: I suggest using condoms over rubber toys. Also, when washing battery-operated or electronic toys, be sure not to submerge them in the water.

Lubrication: Try to steer clear of lubricants containing glycol or glycerin, as both of these agents work as sugars when inside the vagina, thus promoting the growth of yeast. And see the above notes on nonoxyl 9 too.

Peeing After Sex: Urinating after (and before) sexual intercourse reduces the chance of urinary tract infections. Who wants a YI and a UTI, right?



7

Making an Informed Decision About Over-the-Counter and Prescription Medication



When I first started getting YI's, I thought Monistat was a godsend. But then it stopped working, and I found myself in the gynecologist's office, itchy, on edge. The gynecologist gave me a prescription for Fluconazole (the drug commonly marketed under the name Diflucan). The prescription cost \$16 to fill, and consisted of one pink pill that I took orally. My YI receded within a day of taking the pill, and I wondered why so many women were fussing around with the cremes, the suppositories, and the leaky vaginal treatments like Monistat that took up to seven days to cure a YI, when they could just pop one Diflu-

can pill for less money and be done with the matter.

A week later I was back in the gynecologist's office, with, well, it wasn't a YI, but it was certainly something. The gynecologist guessed it was Bacterial Vaginitis, and gave me a prescription for Metronidazol, which made my yoni feel unnaturally dry. My yoni just didn't feel right.

The way that medications like Monistat and Diflucan work is that they kill off the bacteria in the yoni, efficiently eradicating yeast. The medications do not discriminate in what they kill off, however, and so along with killing off

yeast, they also wipe out all of the “good bacteria” in the yoni. This threatens the stability of the flora of the yoni, making it more susceptible to future Yeast Infections. This is exactly what happened in my body, and I think that part of the reason I had so many YI’s that year is because of the way I was choosing to treat them.

Although Diflucan picked up where Monistat had stopped working, this was because Diflucan is a much harsher medication. Because it is taken orally, it also affects more than just your yoni: it threatens the bacterial harmony of the whole gastrointestinal (GI) tract, leaving the body unarmed against fighting off future infections.

IF YOU CHOOSE TO TAKE CONVENTIONAL MEDICATIONS LIKE MONISTAT OR DIFLUCAN

I strongly encourage every woman to make her own informed decisions about how she chooses to treat her Yeast Infection, and for this reason I do not discourage the use of medications like Monistat or

Diflucan. I do, however, have a few pieces of advice on how to supplement these medications:

-Monistat is possibly the harshest non-prescription Yeast Infection medication. You might want to consider using another brand of over-the-counter YI medication.

-The medication Fluconazole is often marketed as Diflucan. Generic brands of Fluconazole work just as well, but will save you some money.

-Because these medications will damage your flora, take a lot of Acidophilus, for at least a week, both orally and vaginally. Follow the dietary restrictions outlined in the “Feed Yourself, Mama” chapter for advice on how to restore your flora and safeguard you against future YI’s.

-You may also want to do the two-finger technique described in the “Feeding and Cleaning Your Vagina” section for immediate symptom relief (since it will take a bit of time before you start to notice results from the medications).



8

Melina's Herbology Corner



Herbs are also incredibly helpful in fighting off infections and restoring balance in the system. Here is a little “best of” list, just for fighting Yeast Infections. Some of these should be taken in tincture form. A tincture is simply a way of preparing herbs: you usually find tinctures in small dark blue or dark brown bottles with eye dropper tops. Most tinctures contain alcohol, but some brands manufacture oil-based tinctures for children and people who cannot have alcohol.

Caldendula ~ *Calendula officinalis*:
Anti-fungal, promotes cell growth and healing of tissues.

Make an infusion of the flowers by putting 5 flowers per cup of boiling water. Steep. Drink or use as douche. You can also purchase in tincture form and take 10-25 drops in water, 2-4 times/day

Goldenseal ~ *Hydrastis canadensis*:
Anti-fungal and anti-bacterial.
Purchase in tincture form, but know that this is an endangered species so only but what you need.

Take 5-20 drops in water, 2-4 times/day, 3 weeks max
Do not use if pregnant

Old Man's Beard/Usnea - Usnea (any species):

Antibacterial, anti-fungal.
Purchase in tincture form and take 10-20 drops in water, 2-3 times/day, 2 weeks max

Black Walnut - *Juglans nigra*:

Anti-parasite and anti-fungal.
Purchase in tincture form and take 5-15 drops in water, 1-3 times/day

Goldenthread - *Coptis groenlandicum*:

Antifungal and anti-bacterial.
Purchase in tincture form, but know that this is an endangered species so only but what you need.
Take 5-50 drops in water, 1-5 times /day, max 10 days
Do not use if pregnant

Astragalus - *Astragalus membra-nucus*:

Strengthens the immune system.
Purchase astragalus root. Put 6-15 grams in 1/2 Liter cold water. Bring to a boil, and let simmer for two hours. Let steep half an hour. Drink.

Nettle - *Urtica dioica*:

Purchase dried nettles and make tea.
Yum yum!

*Other Resources on Yeast Infections, Low
Sugar / Acid Diets, and Women's Health*



BOOKS

Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era. Boston Women's Collective (ISBN: 0743256115).

- This is a great resource for women's health and political, social, and community-oriented non-dogmatic feminism through the lens of sexuality. I think every woman should own this book.

Complete Candida Yeast Guidebook: Everything You Need to Know About Prevention, Treatment & Diet by Jane Marie Martin. (ISBN: 0761527400).

- This is a good resource for learning more about *Candida albicans* (the most common source of Yeast Infections). It's full of great tips on how to keep a vagina-happy diet, with recipes, suggestions for substitutes, and even food shopping advice.

The Vagina Monologues by Eve Ensler. (ISBN: 0375756981).

- Based on Ensler's one-woman play, this is a compilation of stories Ensler has gathered about other women and their experiences with their vaginas. The monologues are anywhere from hilarious to heartbreaking, and leave you with the sense that being a woman is truly an incredible and beautiful thing to be. Although this resource won't give you too much scientific help with Yeast Infections, it is nevertheless inspiring for the woman who wants to empower herself sexually. She's also inspired me to reclaim the word "cunt," which is just great.

Healing with Whole Foods: Asian Traditions and Modern Nutrition. by Paul Pitchford. (ISBN: 1556434308).

- This thick book is a good source for

information on healing all kinds of ailments, just by changing your diet. The information contained within *Healing with Whole Foods* draws on both Chinese Medicine and Western research to address the whole spectrum, from nutrition basics to herbal treatments for mental illness and AIDS.

Chronic Candidiasis: The Yeast Syndrome. by Michael T. Murry, N.D. (ISBN: 076150821X).

- Candida is a lot more than the occasional Yeast Infection. It also causes gas, fatigue, depression, irritability, cravings for carbohydrates, and so on. This is a good guide for learning more and for helping yourself heal naturally.

ZINES

Hot Pants: Do it Yourself Gynecology. Distributed by Blood Sisters: www.BloodSisters.org.

1 877 733 ZONE. c/o Elle Corazon, 176 Bernard West, Montreal, Quebec H2T 2K2, Canada.

- this zine is a great guide for DIY care, and is full of herbal and easy-to-prepare treatments. Topics addressed go anywhere from Yeast Infections to STD to alternative menstrual products to herbally inducing a miscarriage to giving a good foot massage.

Nourishing Endometriosis. Distributed by Blood Sisters: www.BloodSisters.org.

1 877 733 ZONE. c/o Elle Corazon, 176 Bernard West, Montreal, Quebec H2T 2K2, Canada.
- A good introductory zine to endometriosis, full of emotional support, myth-smashing, and lots of simple and effective dietary recommendations and herbal remedies.



In Closing...

I used to get really angry at my body when I'd have a Yeast Infection. I apathetically treated my yoni as if it was a bratty, fickle, demanding child. I would throw at it drugs, I would shove up it creams, and I would irritably try new methods and medications with the silent impatience of, "Here, maybe this will make you shut the fuck up!"

But here's the thing: babies don't cry because they feel like being annoying, and vaginas don't get infected because they think it's fun to make us suffer.

My vagina didn't need to shut up.
I needed to listen up.

I still get the desperate drive to di-

voice myself from my body when I have a YI. But the problem isn't with my body – my body talks to me when there's something wrong that I should know about. Now when I get a YI, I try to ask myself: "How have I been mistreating myself to the degree that my body is telling me about it? How have I recently abused myself through not getting enough rest, not eating healthily, internalizing emotional pain and sexual insecurities, etc?" I've learned much about myself in the process, and I've fine-tuned the skills of compassionate listening.

It's your vagina: listen up! (And love your beautiful self...)

Thank You, From the Bottom of My Vagina



My Parents:

...for making me exist, for helping me pay for alternative doctors and natural treatments not covered by health insurance. For patiently supporting my new radical pursuits, and for standing back with gaping eyes when you didn't understand, honoring that your little baby needs to walk her own path.

Jessica:

...for helping me lighten up, and for relentless interest and undivided support. For adding some humor to my life.

The Union for Gender Empower-

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...for the enthusiasm, the support, the resources, and for creating a safe space for all women on campus.

Doctor Eric Doring:

...for helping me when I sat in your office, frustrated and teary-eyed, for helping me learn more about my body, for answering my questions, for helping me heal in a way that maintains my integrity.

The Employees and Volunteers at the Boulder Food Co-Op:

...for sharing with me your advice and recipes and sauerkraut.

Timothy:

...for your inexhaustible patience, your enthusiasm for learning, and your support. For asking questions, for withholding judgement, for loving me through eight Yeast Infections.

Melina Hoffman:

...for hooking up the herbology section of this zine.

You rock, mama!



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