

HEALTH

Beware of Self-Treatments & Bizarre Vagina Trends

By Maria Sophocles, MD
For NewsUSA

(NU) - The pandemic created a major shift in the way people consume - and, more importantly, trust - information, especially as it relates to vaginal health. In fact, a new survey conducted by OnePoll on behalf of RepHresh of 2,000 American women age 24-34 reveals that two in five women named Google as their go-to source of information over a physician when experiencing discomfort or vaginal health symptoms.

Many women are also turning to social media for health advice. For example, on TikTok, hashtags relating to the words “sex education” have over 70 million views. A now infamous TikTok video, providing a tutorial on how to relieve constipation through “vaginal splinting” has racked up over 3 million views and the latest popular #icecubechallenge claims to tighten the vagina and curb bacterial overgrowth.

While these trending DIY/at-home medical hacks can be entertaining, many of these practices are not only ineffective at controlling the natural balance of good and bad bacteria, but can be dangerous and cause more harm than good. Melting an ice cube in the vagina can elevate the natural pH balance and trigger a bacterial infection as the pH of water (7.5-8) is higher than the normal vaginal pH (3.5-4.5). And, while vaginal splinting is a scientific method used by medical professionals, experts caution trying it at home as it poses a risk of bacterial spread if not done properly.

The RepHresh survey found that over half (51%) thought a vagina should have a neutral pH, and only 12% correctly identified “moderately acidic” as the ideal pH balance. In addition, the top three most Googled phrases and questions respondents needed answers about included “vaginal discharge” (44%), “do I have a yeast infection?” (39%) and “vaginal odor” (37%).

With an uptick in misinformation, most women frequently misdiagnose their vaginal symptoms. That’s why it’s more critical than ever that women turn to trusted health care professionals for advice, proper diagnosis and remedies for the actual problem.

Here are a few important things women might not know, but need to know to maintain good vaginal health:

1. Vaginal odor is completely normal and should not be a cause for alarm. Refrain from using unnecessary scented products, including wipes and washes that claim to eliminate odor with fruity or flowery fragrances, as



this will not solve the root cause of the issue, which is an unbalanced pH. Do look for clinically-backed and doctor-recommended products for vaginal health, such as over-the-counter RepHresh Gel, which rebalances pH to a healthy range, eliminates odor, and lasts up to three days.

2. Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) and yeast infections can present similar symptoms, such as unusual vaginal discharge and discomfort, so when women run to the drug store and buy an OTC yeast medication such as Monistat, they are not addressing the root cause of the problem. Two out of three times it is BV, which must be treated with an antibiotic from their health care provider. But, antibiotics can kill the good and bad bacteria and cause a yeast infection, so make sure to take a vaginal probiotic once a day such as RepHresh Pro-B as it contains 2 strains of vaginal lactobacilli to keep the vaginal flora in balance and eat foods high in probiotics like a healthy no-sugar-added Greek yogurt, kefir, kimchi, or miso.

3. High sugar and alcohol intake can elevate pH imbalances and contribute to an overgrowth of yeast. Maintain a healthy moderation of sugary drinks and junk food as excess amounts not only impact vaginal health, but overall weight gain and wellness.

4. Vaginal discharge is a completely normal function in which the vagina naturally removes old cells to keep the environment healthy and clean. Some women have more discharge, while others might experience very little, and it can change in color and thickness depending on the ovulation cycle. However, discharge accompanied with itching, burning, fishy odor, swelling, unusual color, or pelvic pain should be brought to a doctor’s attention as it can be a bacterial infection or STI and must be treated appropriately.

Before trying something new, consult with your healthcare provider especially when things seem off to ensure the safety and efficacy of the method or product you are considering. And, don’t miss your annual OB/GYN visit.

Maria Sophocles, MD, OB/GYN is the Medical Director of Women’s Healthcare of Princeton in Princeton, NJ.