

# **Be Free From Bacterial Vaginosis**

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***Put an End to the Constant Pain and Embarrassment  
BV Causes By Making Simple Lifestyle Changes  
That Help You Avoid Recurrent Infections!***

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## Chapter 1: What Is Bacterial Vaginosis? The Surprising Difference That Delays Treatment

For most any chronic problem in the vaginal area, women are often told it's "just a yeast infection." After a few such experiences, many women don't even bother to go to the gynecologist since they assume that this is a recurrence of the yeast infections.

Instead of seeking medical advice, they try for the easy fix. They think that's found at the local drugstore.

So they buy an over-the-counter slimy cream, or a powder that gets all over clothes and linens. But it's cheaper than a prescription drug and quick to obtain, so it makes sense at the time.

Then there are the hand-me-down yeast infection remedies - hot baths, cold baths, ice (ugh?) or drinking gallons of cranberry juice. No wonder women are frustrated by this problem.

What they don't know is that they may be treating **THE WRONG PROBLEM**. The persistent yeast infection is actually Bacterial Vaginosis (also called BV).

While certain aspects of BV may *feel* similar to a yeast infection, these conditions are not the same. Think of it this way: If you get sick and assume that it's only a head cold, you will under-treat the cold.

You might feel better for a week, but the bug isn't gone. What you really had was the flu and it's not finished with you yet. The milder medications that you took might slow down the flu bug, but it wasn't a knock-out punch - so the flu comes back with a vengeance, bringing more symptoms that hang on longer.

If only you had known it was the flu and taken the right medication to kill instead of merely stun the flu bug, you'd feel a whole lot better - *faster*.



That's similar to what happens when you attempt to treat BV as if it's a yeast infection. You're merely prolonging the agony. BV is both physically and emotionally uncomfortable.

The physical symptoms are painful itching and burning that doesn't get relief even with the creams, powders or douches. No matter how hard you try to keep clean and fresh, that disgusting fish odor lingers.

The emotional impact of BV is stressful - even in a committed relationship. After all, how can you feel sexy when your finest perfume is mixed with vaginal body odor?

Bacterial Vaginosis occurs when the normal bacteria found in the vagina is overtaken by unfriendly bacteria. You might say it's an imbalance of bacteria. This isn't even an unusual condition.

Before getting embarrassed by something that is a medical issue, keep this in mind: having BV does *not* imply that a woman engages in any unusual sexual practices.

Any woman of childbearing age is potentially at risk for BV. Even women who are not sexually active can get BV.

What does BV feel like? How can you recognize the symptoms? Here are the basic ways to recognize BV:

- Vaginal discharge that is thicker and lasts longer than normal
- Vaginal discharge smells sour or fishy, particularly after intercourse
- The color of the discharge is white or gray
- Painful burning sensation when urinating with no other indications of a urinary tract infection
- Itching or burning sensation in the vaginal area

One or more of these symptoms would certainly tell you that treatment is needed. But here's an oddity about BV that differs from yeast infection: Some women who have chronic BV have NONE OF THOSE SYMPTOMS.

For them, the infection has months to years to build up in the body without challenge. The long-term consequences are devastating as well as the ongoing discomfort.

### **Where Do You Get BV?**

BV is not floating around the air like the flu. Here are some of the myths about how women get BV:

- A toilet seat used by an infected person
- Sitting in wet sand at the beach
- Lingering in public or private swimming pools
- In a hot tub or sauna
- Touching objects used by an infected person
- Sleeping on bedding not properly sanitized
- Wearing wet swim suit too long
- Failure to dry completely after shower or swimming
- Wearing undergarments washed in harsh detergents
- Lingering too long in a hot bubble bath
- Excess use of perfumed lotions in the vaginal area
- Sharing clothing with other women

These so called “bacterial transmission” methods are the stuff of urban legends and scary stories but they are **not** factual.

Bacterial Vaginosis is generally transmitted with sexual contact - whether between male and female or two females. While medical research has not pinpointed all the details on transmission of BV, one factor does stand out: women who have never been sexually active and remain abstinent rarely get BV.

### **How Many Women Have BV?**

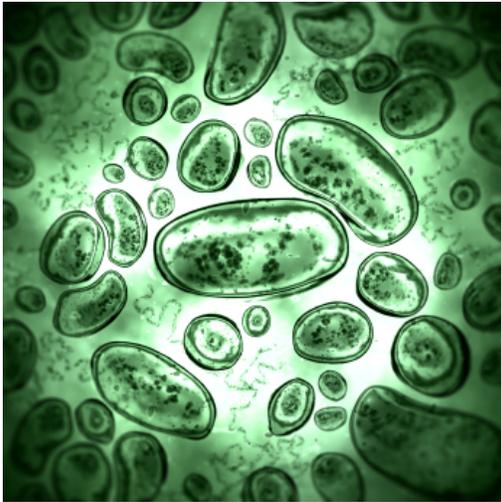
Since Bacterial Vaginosis is often misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all, it's difficult to get an accurate count on how many women have BV. From

the available medical data at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in every 424 women is reported to have BV.

As for the incidents among various ethnic groups, BV is most prevalent among African Americans (23%) and Hispanics (16%). Fewer incidents of BV are found among Caucasians (9%) and Asians (6%).

### **Normal Versus Abnormal**

Obviously Bacterial Vaginosis is an abnormal condition in the vagina that is both uncomfortable and needs treatment to restore the normal vaginal environment. Before going farther in describing BV as an abnormality, this is the time to discuss what is *normal* in the vagina.



A healthy vagina has bacteria. Does that shock you to think that bacteria are casually floating along inside your private place?

Not to worry, the normal bacteria are good for the vaginal area because it acts like a resident clean-up crew.

Women only notice discharge when it's thick or odorous. Whether or not you realize it, there are varying amounts of vaginal discharge that regularly occur.

The amount is small and the odor is not offensive, so most women hardly notice.

Contrary to old viewpoints, a small amount of vaginal discharge is not a signal to douche. The opposite is true. Excessive douching *damages* the normal balance of good bacteria in the vagina, which makes it easier for BV and other harmful bacteria to thrive.

While many women cringe at the thought of a yeast infection, the normal vagina has some level of yeast, just not enough to cause painful symptoms. This area is warm, secluded and moist, so as with any such environment, these are the conditions for bacteria to grow and multiply.

Treatments for BV and yeast infections dramatically alter the balance of this internal ecosystem, which helps one problem but usually leads to another or a reoccurrence of the original problem.

A healthy vagina has an environment in which the good bacteria are more prominent than the harmful bacteria. A woman's body is constantly monitoring and regulating good bacteria in various areas so the balance tips toward health.

Often, conditions outside the body lead to an imbalance, which results in BV or other vaginal infections that require treatment to restore the healthy balance.

### ***Is BV an Infection or an STD?***

Medical researchers disagree widely on this question. In some articles, you read that Bacterial Vaginosis is classified as a sexually transmitted disease - then in other articles, it's considered an infection.

Even respected medical experts have differing opinions, which is the reason that articles you read may seem contradictory. For example, the information from the Centers for Disease Control lists BV among the STDs and incorporates BV treatment guideline with those for STDs.

The reason that these seem so close is that BV is usually found in women who are sexually active or have been sexually active. So the connection between this and STD makes sense. Doctors also know that women with multiple sex partners have a higher risk for BV – just like any of the STDs you know about.

Here's the situation: the pain, frustration and irritation are the same, whether it's BV or an STD, so attention is better focused on solving the problem rather than how to classify it. Never avoid going to the doctor or health clinic out of fear that the problem may be an STD.

If the idea of BV being viewed by some physicians as an STD is embarrassing, then keep in mind that women who are not sexually active can get BV too, whereas sexual activity is a firm prerequisite for getting an STD.

Please don't hide behind "it's just a yeast infection" because it's more socially acceptable in some circles rather than seek needed treatment for BV. This is not the time to pretend, this is time to get the facts and act on the facts.

## ***Is There a Test for BV?***

A basic test used by the physician to make a diagnosis is the pH level. This is a chemical measurement that determines the level of acid or alkaline which is an important factor in knowing whether the conditions are right to sustain BV.

As part of the pelvic examination, the doctor removes a small sample of fluid from the vagina to use for this test. The procedure is quick and painless.

Even a healthy woman has bacteria in the vaginal fluid, which cause no problems. If Bacterial Vaginosis is present, the fluid sample will show an increase in certain microorganisms such as Gardnerella, Bacteriodes, Mycoplasma and Mobiluncus. Over time these harmful bacteria destroy the useful bacteria.

A woman has no idea that this war between good bacteria and harmful bacteria is happening unless she experiences obvious symptoms. As irritating as the discharge and odor can be, it's an ideal early warning system telling her to get a checkup.

The pH in a healthy vagina ranges from 3.8 to 4.5 (WebMD). When BV is present, the pH count rises about 4.5. A fluid sample may also be viewed under a microscope with a bold dye added.

The testing for BV involves both chemistry and a good nose for bacteria. The gram-positive (harmful) bacteria turn bright purple while the gram-negative (healthy) bacteria look pale to pink. Gardnerella, gram negative bacteria, is often found with BV.

The good nose aspect of BV testing is that when vaginal fluid is exposed to the test fluid, the trademark strong fish odor is released. The test technician literally sniffs the test sample to identify that odor which has become all too familiar to a woman who has BV. Granted this does not sound like a pleasant job, but fortunately some people have the training to apply this process needed in making the diagnosis.

Another way that BV is detected by a physician is as part of a routine Pap Test.

While this is not the most efficient way to identify BV, it can be a help particularly for women who show no other symptoms that would cause them concern about an infection.



Relying on a Pap Test to identify BV is not the best idea because the sensitivity to BV is very low, thus if it is detected by this test, then the infection is rampant.

Because BV symptoms are similar to those of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), the physician may order additional tests for STDs. The strong odor that is characteristic of BV is also found in two particularly dangerous STDs, gonorrhea and Chlamydia.

Knowing whether the problem is BV only or BV and possibly and STD is critical in guiding the physician toward the right treatment option.

To get a valid test, women need to follow these precautions before having a medical test for BV:

- No sex for 24 hours prior to the test
- No douching for 24 hours prior to the test
- Eliminate all vaginal medicines for 3 days prior to the test, regardless of whether the medicines are prescription or over-the-counter treatments
- Reduce acidic intake in foods and drink prior to the test
- Reschedule the appointment if menstrual period starts

Any of these conditions could alter the results of the test. When that happens, you waste time going to the appointment and leave with a false sense of security. In a week or so, that feeling will be shattered as the BV returns even more ferocious than before and you have to start the testing process over again.

## ***How Do You Know When It's Time to Get Treatment?***

The simple answer is, go for treatment when you first see signs of an infection – not when you can't stand it any longer. In fact there is no such thing as “too soon” for seeking help. It's also not wise to continue to tough it out in the hope that the infection will go away as suddenly as it appeared.

The most important first step is to get the proper medical testing to know the difference between BV and yeast infection or other types of sexually transmitted diseases since many of them have similar initial symptoms.

Many physicians don't wait for the test results to prescribe some level of treatment. Some suggest the “benign” approach, sending the woman home to have warm baths, drink cranberry juice and reduce sexual contact for a week.

This is not so suggest that the physician fails to take the problem seriously, but rather that it's a way to stimulate the body to repel the invading harmful bacteria. The idea is that the body's immune system can take care of things so the treatment is more inclined toward giving her something to focus on besides the BV.

Other physicians are quick to prescribe general antibiotics, taking the “fire full approach” at the bacteria and hope to blast it away. The obvious concern is that if BV is prone to come back several times, and then are antibiotics are most common method of medical treatment.

## Chapter 2: Antibiotics - When the Super Drugs Fail to Deliver

In the medical community, infection and antibiotics are logical companions. Over centuries as antibiotics developed into more sophisticated and targeted treatment options, many diseases that formerly killed people were cured. As with any drug, there is the good side and the bad side.

### **Antibiotics: Common Treatment for BV**

Antibiotics are intended to be heavy weapons in the war against bacteria. With Bacterial Vaginosis, the potential is high that antibiotics become “friendly fire,” killing off more of the good bacteria than the bad bacteria.



Generally speaking, the good bacteria are not as powerful as the bad bacteria so they are early casualties in the antibiotic assault.

The good bacteria have no chance to repopulate the vaginal environment when harmful bacteria make the conditions hostile territory.

A major problem that frustrates physicians is that too many patients finish taking all the antibiotics in the prescription bottle.

Even with the added instructions on the label plus the information sheet provided by the pharmacy, women don't read these important instructions.

What tends to happen is that after a week, a woman feels better and notices less discharge or odor problems, so she pronounces herself “cured” and tosses away the drugs. While it may seem silly to continue taking medication after feeling better, it's absolutely necessary.

### **Which Is Better - Oral or Vaginal Antibiotics?**

Prescription antibiotics are delivered in either oral or vaginal medications. The question of better or worse is difficult to answer since what is better is the antibiotic that works fastest with the least negative side effects. Unfortunately, the only way to find this out is to use the medication.

The vaginal medications are in gel, cream or suppository form. While these can be messy, the advantage of vaginal medications is that there is less likelihood of experiencing the side effects, which can occur with oral medications.

Even though a woman may prefer to use the cream or gel prescription, those are not acceptable choices when pregnant or attempting to get pregnant. Vaginal medications are not considered safe for use by pregnant women because these medications are inserted directly into the vaginal canal.

Oral medications are easier to take and some antibiotics are only available in the pill form such as Flagyl, Tinidazole and Tindamax. Cleocin and Metronidazole can be prescribed in either oral or vaginal medication forms.

The oral medications can be more precise in dealing with systemic infection; however they come with some unpleasant side effects such as:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Headache
- External rash
- Oral thrush (internal rash)
- Metallic after-taste
- Burning sensation similar to acid reflux
- Vaginal yeast infection

When taking some oral medications, the nausea and vomiting can become severe if any alcohol is consumed. Even small amounts of alcohol such as in over-the-counter medications can prompt these reactions.

Some side effects signal a serious medical complication that needs immediate attention. The prescription information sheet provided by the pharmacy tells which side effects are the most severe.

If the diarrhea does not stop, the woman is losing life preserving electrolytes that cannot continue to be depleted. Blood in the stool or severe cramps that are more intense than the menstrual cramping are cause to seek medical treatment.

### ***How Effective Is an Antibiotic Treatment for BV?***

Physicians use the term "a course of antibiotics" such as for 14 or 21 days.

This time period is based on research, which indicates the average length of time needed for the antibiotics to fully wipe out the bad bacteria.

To stop short of this time is to invite the bad bacteria to keep the party going.

The disappointment is that after dealing with side effects from oral medications or messy vaginal creams and gels, the success rate from these treatments ranges from 50%-90% according to the CDC's 2002 guidelines.

After all that effort and surviving side effects, a woman hopes for something more certain to take away the aggravation of living with BV. The anticipation of getting help quickly for BV is not always met with the success level that expected.

Failure to complete a course of antibiotics several times and the bad bacteria literally grow stronger and more immune to the medication the next time. Completing all the pills in the bottle, whether you think you need it or not, is crucial.



If the drug causes side effects that are uncomfortable, contact the physicians and let him or her decide how to transition to another drug. Unless there is a medical degree on your wall, don't make this decision for yourself.

### ***The Downside of Antibiotics***

Americans are a pill oriented society. We want to deal with any medical problem with a pill and preferable a fast-acting pill. Unfortunately, the same antibiotics that can eliminate BV can also cause a reoccurrence of BV. Yes, that sounds bizarre, but it's a bacterial reality.

Women who fail to complete all the antibiotics in the pill bottle or use all the cream/gel are making it easier for BV to return. Even if you are tired of bothering with the medication because you feel better, you can't stop the medication too soon.

Antibiotics are like the invasion force landing on the beach to push back enemy forces (the bad bacteria). That's why you can start to feel better in a few days and get a false sense of security that all is well. However, plenty of the bad bacteria escaped the first assault of medication and is ready to stir up the symptoms again.

Continuing to take the antibiotics until completion gives the medication time to destroy all the bad bacteria. That sounds like good news but there's a bit of bad news along with it

### ***Antibiotics Set Up New Problems***

Use of heavy antibiotics or repeated use of these drugs sets up more problems than just those in the vaginal environment. Repeated use of antibiotics for any medical problem becomes a new problem in itself.



What the physician rarely tells a woman is how to offset these problems. When taking antibiotics, drink Lacto-bacillus milk or eat yogurt with Probiotics. If you don't like milk or yogurt, probiotic supplements are available in capsule form from a health food store.

Research has shown that frequent use of antibiotics for childhood ear infections leads to development of more ear problems. The same situation can occur for adults as well.

When women take several courses of antibiotics, they are at higher risk for earaches and sinusitis.

Once that happens, they go to the general practice physician who promptly prescribes more antibiotics and the cycle of symptoms continues.

Women must not be lulled into thinking that an antibiotic for BV only impacts the vaginal area. Once in the system, an antibiotic can affect any part of the body.

While taking antibiotics you can expect to have bad breath. That happens because the good bacteria in the intestinal tract have been diminished so the digestive process is not working efficiently. That bad breath is an early warning that the antibiotics have meddled with the balance in the intestinal tract.

Even if there is no bad breath or grumbling stomach, always pay attention to replenish the good bacteria that is diminished by the antibiotics. This will help to avoid repeat occurrence of BV or a new yeast infection.

It will also help your digestive system to function better and to avoid constipation from poorly processed foods that back up into the system.

### ***Bacteria Learn Fast***

Bacteria are smart and they learn fast. BV has a remarkable ability to become resistant to antibiotics after the second or third time of treatment.

For some women, that resistance can build up after just one course of treatment.

When the antibiotic medication is no longer effective in eliminating BV, another antibiotic is substituted in its place. The problem is, these antibiotics are all chemically similar in purpose so it gets harder and harder to find one that works after several BV treatments.

Not only are the antibiotics less able to fight back the BV after several treatments, but some women found that the side effects are more dramatic and long lasting.

It becomes a toss-up as to which is worse; constant nausea and headaches or BV smelly discharge and itching. Women in this situation don't know where to turn for help, particularly after taking medication faithfully and still having these unpleasant side effects.

How can you know if your body is drug resistant to BV antibiotics? Your treatment will follow a course like this:

- Physician makes the BV diagnosis and prescribes an antibiotic
- Patient informs the physician if she has any prior negative experiences with any antibiotics
- Start taking prescription antibiotics for BV
- Within 4-7 days, patient feels relief from the antibiotic medication and gains a sense of hope that the BV can be cured
- Within the same 4-7 days, patient experiences side effects that are mild to severe
- Patient reports side effects to physician
- If side effects are severe, an alternative antibiotic is prescribed
- The patient may have to go off the antibiotic early in order to get the severe side effects under management
- Or the patient fails to report side effects to the physician and decides to stop taking the drug

- The toughest bacteria take the longest to eradicate so stopping or changing medications create conditions in which the bad bacteria thrive while the good bacteria have little chance to take back control of the vaginal environment

Each time this cycle is played out, the bad bacteria learn how to evade the antibiotic or basically ignore it. You might say that the bad bacteria "eat the antibiotic for lunch" when they overtake any positive result.

This sets up the conditions for a repeat of BV, which is strongest and now more drug resistant than before.

### ***Over-the-Counter Medications***

Ok, if prescription medications are not a sure cure and cost more money (plus the cost of the doctor's appointment), then are over-the-counter medications just as effective?

After all, it's easier to drop into the discount retailer, supermarket or 24 hour pharmacy and grab a tube of medication on the way home.

Do some comparison shopping and discover that the over-the-counter medications are neither cheap nor highly effective for serious bout of BV. These medications are mostly anti-fungal, which can work for a yeast infection, but BV is not the same problem.

There might be less expensive over-the-counter medications available on the Internet, but you need relief now, not five days later after the package reaches your mailbox.

Purchasing online means that you have to do the product research because there's no pharmacist to consult.

Over-the-counter medications are not going to be as powerful as prescription antibiotics so you could spend more and suffer longer waiting for the cheaper treatment to work.

The local pharmacy is a better option than buying from the supermarket or discount retailer as there is a pharmacist to ask for advice in choosing a product.

Don't be misled by the advertisements touting the strength and effectiveness of over-the-counter creams or gels. The pharmacist will confirm, these over-the-counter medications are generalized and not

targeted the way that prescription antibiotics are toward specific types of bacteria.

Because there is no way to monitor the use of over-the-counter medications, the potency is not as high as what can be given in a prescription medication from a physician or health clinic.

On the other hand, an over-the-counter cream or gel may be better than nothing late on Saturday night when you simply can't stand the BV symptoms another minute.

Any help is worthwhile, just realize that over-the-counter medications only offer a temporary relief from symptom but they lack the potential to cure a serious BV outbreak.

## Chapter 3: How BV Complicates Your Life

The mere presence of any kind of infection makes you experience a lot of emotions, but bacterial vaginosis also causes other complications – physical and dangerous in some instances.

### ***BV and Pregnancy***

Even a pregnant woman can get BV, which becomes a risk for the unborn child as well as the mother if left untreated.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, Bacterial Vaginosis is found in over one million pregnant women, more than Herpes, Chlamydia or other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's & Pregnancy, CDC fact sheet).

BV during pregnancy is not unusual. The American Pregnancy Association reports that 10% to 30% of women have BV during the course of their pregnancies.

That shatters the myth that BV cannot be contracted during pregnancy.

Unless a woman reports BV type symptoms, many physicians do not screen for this infection.

A woman can be pro-active for her health and that of her unborn child by insisting that the physicians conduct this simple BV screening as a precaution.

Bacteria have a nasty habit of spreading so when a pregnant woman has BV, the bacteria can move into the womb or fallopian tubes. At that point, the bacteria becomes an infection known as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Left untreated, PID is a leading cause of infertility as well as ectopic pregnancy.



Another risk factor for pregnant women who have BV is premature delivery or a baby with low birth weight. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend that any woman with a history of low birth weight babies or premature delivery needs to be tested for BV early in the next pregnancy.

There are antibiotic treatments that can be taken by many pregnant women without harm to the baby. The choice of antibiotics needs to be left to the Obstetrician who knows the woman's overall health and determine potential risks to the unborn baby.

### ***BV and Infertility***

Women who want to get pregnant but are not conceiving begin to search aggressively for the problem. If all the basic equipment for conception and carrying a baby are intact, then the fertility specialist begins to look for other conditions that can be treated.

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) is a condition that is on the rise among women of childbearing age. PID can so drastically damage the fallopian tubes and uterus that pregnancy is impossible or if pregnancy occurs, the danger for ectopic pregnancy is extreme.

When the egg gets trapped in a fallopian tube that is damaged or twisted from infection, the pregnancy will not develop. If left undetected, the tube will eventually burst from the pressure of the growing egg.

There is usually no warning that what is assumed to be a normal pregnancy is actually an ectopic pregnancy. So when the tube ruptures immediate medical care is necessary. This type of miscarriage can also be life threatening to the mother.

What many women don't know is that Bacterial Vaginosis is an infection, which left untreated, can lead to the development of Pelvic Inflammatory disease, a serious medical problem.

The irritating BV symptoms that seem to interfere with an active social life in younger ages may be the death knell to the dream of having a healthy baby a few years later if PID causes permanent damage to the reproductive system.

This dangerous connection with PID is another reason that BV cannot be ignored or taken lightly. Once PID sets in, a woman is not just at risk for infertility but for other serious medical consequences.

## ***Is There Any Sex Life With BV?***

Because BV creeps up before the serious symptoms signal the presence of the infection, women are involved in an active sex life as BV is developing. For some women, it's a comment from a partner about the fishy odor or the sticky discharge that alerts them to the problem if no other symptoms are felt.

When BV mixes with semen, it's like the kind of gross smell from a chemical reaction that cleared the chemistry lab in high school. This situation can be embarrassing and lead to a shy goodbye.



Who can feel sexy and alluring knowing that once the clothes come off, the partner may be turned off by the foul smelling vaginal discharge?

Just the fear of being rejected because of BV is enough to test the relationship.

Explaining the BV condition is taking the honest approach, which may or may not be well received.

Some women are concerned that to even admit to a vaginal infection will cause the partner to think that it's really something worse – like HIV - and shun them.

Another real turn-off is when a woman makes repeated trips to the bathroom in an effort to wash away the discharge or add perfumed lotions to counteract the BV smell that distracts from the moment.

The worst idea is to use scented vaginal lubricants as a way to mask the foul odor from the BV. It's like attempting to camouflage the smell of burned food with a floral spray. The mixture is totally disgusting, even worse than the initial bad smell.

As an infection, BV causes the vagina to be tender, stretched and uncomfortable with vaginal intercourse. Faking an orgasm is one thing,

but faking enjoyment when the entire vaginal area is as irritated as a third degree sunburn isn't happening. Talk about ruining the romantic scene - the symptoms of BV can certainly do that.

### ***BV and STD – Are They the Same?***

Because BV is also found among women who have multiple sex partners (male or female). For that reason, some medical researchers classify BV as a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD).

In other research, BV is not considered an STD. So the question is unclear about whether having sex when a woman knows that she has BV is dangerous to the partner. Perhaps the danger is greater for the woman who already has BV than it is for her partner.

There is also medical evidence that BV frequently occurs soon after starting a relationship with a new sex partner. While there is no proof that a woman with BV can infect her partner, the woman can benefit from sexual abstinence while treating the BV.

When a woman has BV, she is at higher risk of contracting HIV from her partner, particularly during unprotected sexual activity. If a woman already has HIV and BV, then she is more likely to pass HIV to her partner.

BV is different from HIV, yet because BV causes irritation to the vaginal wall tissues, it is easier for the HIV virus to pass into the bloodstream. Some of the good bacteria that might have attempted to protect a healthy vagina are so diminished that they are overcome by the tougher HIV virus.

Contracting HIV isn't the only heightened danger that a woman faces with untreated BV. She is also at risk for other STDs such as herpes or Chlamydia. These STD's come with their own set of unpleasant symptoms and long term risks to health and fertility.

Since sexual activity changes the vaginal environment with the introduction of semen and potentially other bacteria from the partner, taking a break from sex to get the BV under control makes sense. It may not be the popular choice but it is the safe choice.

### ***BV and Surgery***

Because any surgical procedure carries the risk for infection, surgeries in the vaginal area can leave behind the conditions for developing BV. If a

woman already has BV, which may not be diagnosed, then the surgery compounds the infection problem.

The need for BV testing during pregnancy is even more important if there is a likelihood that the baby will be delivered by Caesarean section. An emergency C-section can happen too fast for testing. However if there is any discussion of a C-section delivery early in the prenatal care, a woman needs to request that she receive a test for BV.

BV has also been shown to be a risk in post abortion recovery, hysterectomy or any other surgery involving a woman's reproductive system. Even if a woman is in a hurry to get done with a particular reproductive surgery, she needs to be tested and treated for BV symptoms.

Never ignore these symptoms as something that will pass without further attentions.

A BV infection can become worse as well as delay the recovery from any surgical procedure.

In a worst-case scenario, the BV infection could compound other post surgical problems and the result can actually be a life-threatening situation.



Particularly if the surgeon is not also the OB-GYN, then he or she may not be aware of prior instances of BV.

So even if you suspect BV or some other infection, don't ignore it, tell the surgeon prior to any operation.

### **Conditions Made Worse By BV**

If a woman already has certain medical conditions, the incidence of BV can be even harder to manage and to cure. Those conditions are:

- Chronic yeast infection – This condition alters the balance of bacteria in the vagina setting up the ideal conditions for development of BV.

Prescription treatments for yeast infection are designed to wipe out harmful bacteria but plenty of good bacteria is also lost during this treatment.

- Low estrogen levels - When the estrogen levels are below normal, the lining of the vagina becomes thinner and more prone to infection
- High estrogen levels - Taking birth control pills is the usual reason that estrogen levels are above normal in women who are otherwise healthy. Of course, the other reason for high estrogen is when a woman is pregnant. Higher levels of estrogen seem to be associated with greater risk for infection.
- Pregnancy – When the hormones bounce around in pregnancy and estrogen goes into over-drive, the conditions are ripe for BV. As already mentioned, the treatment options need to be carefully considered to avoid any harm to the unborn baby.
- Allergic reactions - Women who are allergic to certain oral or vaginal antibiotics have limited options for treating BV. These women may not be able to tolerate the most powerful prescription drugs and must turn to alternative medicine or natural treatment options.
- Lupus, HIV or other autoimmune disease – The nature of an autoimmune disease is that the body's disease fighting power is greatly diminished. Under those conditions, BV is just one of many vaginal infections that can easily multiply and become a chronic condition.

### ***How Physicians View BV***

Bacterial Vaginosis is often mis-diagnosed as yeast infection because the symptoms are similar. Since Gynecologists see so many yeast infection problems, it's easy for them to accept this as the problem and not even order a BV test.

Some doctors are also quick to blame too much sex or unprotected sex as the cause of the infection and advise women to deal with those issues so the problem goes away. Of course, BV doesn't go away that easily.



Women who are not sexually active have been extremely embarrassed when a physician confronts them about sex practices as the cause of the infection.

Feeling as if they are being accused of stepping outside their personal moral boundaries, they don't go back to the doctor for help when the infection reoccurs because they don't want to hear this again.

Male physicians can be the least sensitive about the discomfort of BV. They either don't see this as a serious problem or believe that the women have the responsibility to make lifestyle changes in order to control the infection.

The other problem is that physicians can have favored drugs that they prescribed for any vaginal infection. While these antibiotics may be fine for some uses, the drugs can be excessive for BV.

When the drug choices are not well targeted, the overload of drugs causes major damage to the good bacteria that is needed to balance the vaginal environment.

Are physicians being ambivalent about treating BV? Yes and no. Yes, physicians are relying on the old standard approach to use heavy-duty antibiotics to knock out the infection.

No, they are not uncaring. However, some are less informed about the fine line differences between Bacterial Vaginosis and the typical yeast infection.

Pharmaceutical companies applaud the massive antibiotic approach because it sells more drugs. When the drugs become overkill and set up the conditions for a reoccurrence of BV, then more prescription drugs are sold.

It seems as if the drug companies profit more the longer the treatment drags on. That is expensive for the woman who is ready to try anything just to get relief.

## **Chapter 4: Prevent BV - Proactive Self-Care Does Make a Difference**

People used to say, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." That is still true, particularly when applied to dealing with infections. Since BV is so difficult to cure and likely to return even after treatment, women need to pay attention to basic ways to prevent any occurrence of BV.

### ***Practical Ways to Prevent BV***

None of these suggestions is difficult or even expensive. For the most part, it's simply becoming aware of conditions in which BV thrives and making other choices.

When women become proactive about their health, they are in control over their bodies and not depending on drugs or doctors to solve an infection problem. Better to avoid infection than deal with curing it.

This isn't to suggest that infection prevention is easy, however a few basic precautions go a long way to protecting a woman from BV or from a reoccurrence of BV.

- Reduce or eliminate douching. Even liquids made for douche are strong enough to upset the balance of good bacteria to bad bacteria.
- Douching can actually spread BV. A strong douche can cause newly forming BV to spread further u the reproductive tract than it otherwise would.
- Reduce potential for E.coli bacteria from the rectum to enter the vagina by wiping from front to back after bowel movements.
- Scented toilet paper may leave a nice smell in the bathroom, but the chemicals in the scent can irritate the vaginal area.
- Personal hygiene products with scents of fruits or flowers are advertised as sexy but the perfume within the product can be too harsh for the vaginal area.
- Clean up after sex. Forget the lingering moment and think about how the moisture and semen are a breeding ground for bacteria. Wash gently with an antibacterial cleanser, which is made for use in the vaginal area, not just whatever soap is handy.

- The classic white cotton panties may not be as chic as a lace thong but they are less likely to support formation of bacteria. Cotton is a natural fiber that absorbs moisture and allows for air circulation. At least keep several pairs for routine wear.
- Women who use diaphragms or cervical caps must wash these carefully, rinse and dry before re-use. These devices not only prevent pregnancy but the snug fit creates a bacteria nursery if not properly cleaned before use.
- Always practice safe sex. The use of condoms is important to reduce spread of STD's or other infections between partners.

### ***Stay Dry, Stay Healthy***

Chances are as a child you thought it odd that your mother or grandmother insisted that you "get out of those wet clothes". Whether you just came in from the swimming pool or got caught in a rainstorm, the prevailing logic was to change out of all clothes (including undergarments) and put on dry clothes.

While staying in wet clothes may not cause you to "catch your death of cold," as Grandmother warned, it can contribute to an ugly outbreak of Bacterial Vaginosis.

Think about it, how many times do you come out of the pool and linger on the patio sunbathing in a wet swimsuit? Or do you spend the entire afternoon at the lakefront, diving into the cool water then getting back on the dock for a lemonade break? After all, why dry off and get dressed when you might want to get back into the water?

The fact is, it's better to change into clean dry clothes, rinse out the swim suit and let it dry before putting it on again. Even the best-cleaned pool is still a place that bacteria can grow.

In a lake, it's totally open season for BV infection and so many other infections. Swimming or tubing in a lake or stream may seem like harmless fun, but a few days later when the BV symptoms start, the fun is definitely over.

If you are a regular for swimming, water skiing, diving or snorkeling, bring two or three swimsuits and extra dry towels to change rather than let your

wet swimsuit become a hotbed for infection. A little extra laundry is much easier to manage than BV.

Towels are another problem that is often overlooked. This is challenging because even hotels put out signs asking that guests re-use towels to save water.

Being environmentally friendly is important, yet you also have to protect the vaginal environment, which does not need repeated infection. Reuse of a towel that has already been damp is another mistake that women make. Bring a beach towel to sit on but use a fresh, clean towel to dry the body.

Women who have had repeated episodes of BV know the importance of drying the vaginal area before dressing in street clothes. Some women find that using the hair dryer on low is better for drying vulva area than creating new irritations to that delicate tissue by rubbing with a towel.

### ***Your Mother Was Right – Always Wear Clean Underwear***

Mother may have told you to always “wear clean underwear in case you get in an accident.” She was thinking more of the kind of accident that leads to a trip to the emergency room since those hospital gowns have tendency to cover little. What she wasn't thinking about is the accidental encounters with infection.

Wearing clean undergarments every day is vital to your vaginal health. Don't get lazy by falling out of bed at the last possible minute, then throwing on clothes to rush to work.

Just because underwear has no odor, does not mean that you can go two days on one pair.

If you are a last minute dresser or if you want to wait until after work to take a long soak in the tub, you still need to change underwear. Make it a habit to put on clean panties either before going to bed at night or when getting dressed in the morning.



Perhaps that's why there is now a line of women's panties that have the days of the week printed on them, just like the ones you wore as a little girl. If that's what it takes to make this a new habit, then do it.

Anytime you wear pantyhose or tights, make certain to wash these after every use. In fact, it's better to avoid wearing these during an outbreak of BV. Pantyhose and tights literally encase you from legs to waist.

Even in colder weather, your body temperature warms when inside a building and that's when this warm, secluded area becomes ideal for infection growth. While it is fine to wear pantyhose or tights without panties, just treat them the same as you do panties and wash after every wear.

Sexy underwear tends to be alluring but not the best choice for keeping infection at a distance. Save the sexy items for the right place and time but wear the cotton panties other times, particularly if you have an outbreak of BV or just finished one.

Cotton panties may not be sexy to your significant other, but neither is the fishy odor of BV.

### ***Change Your Washing Habits***

How do you wash your clothes? Do you toss everything into one wash - shirts, sheets, undergarments and the rest? That's a bad idea. Separating your clothes for different wash cycles, detergents and temperatures not only extends the useful life of clothing, but also lets you regulate the chemicals that affect your body.

For any woman who is prone to infection, a hypoallergenic laundry detergent is essential. Also choose one that is fragrance free. As nice as the spring breeze smell might be, a better way to get that fresh smell is by hanging your sheets and towels on the line to dry than by adding a version of chemical sunshine.

No need to over load on bleach. Wash bath towels, swim towel and wash cloths in fragrance free, hypoallergenic detergent at hot water setting then promptly place in dryer. Note the word *promptly*. Leaving wet towels to simmer in the washing machine before drying is one more breeding opportunity for bacteria.

### ***Skip the Bubble Bath***

No matter how much you enjoy a long soak in a warm bubble bath after a tough day at work, this is not the best option during or immediately after an outbreak of BV.

Sorry to burst the bubble on this one, but the chemicals in bubble bath can be too harsh for an already irritable vagina. If the BV outbreak is in full swing, you will feel the stinging and get out of the tub fast.

Unfortunately if the BV infection is just starting up and has yet to produce major symptoms, that long tub bath simple gives it encouragement.

Make certain that the soap used for your body is a natural soap without added fragrances. Any soap that is recommended for the delicate skin of infants is a good choice.

Other options are the basic soaps like Ivory™ soap from the grocery store or organic soaps from the health food store.

### ***Sharing Isn't a Virtue with BV***

Since kindergarten you have been taught to share with others. Without compromising this gracious behavior, at times sharing leads to more problems than benefits.



partner.

For a couple, bath towel sharing can occur without any conscious thought. The first person to shower grabs the handy towel, uses it, and then replaces it on the rack.

If the next person takes a shower later after that towel is dry, it might be mistaken as clean and be used again.

Just because you share a bed and other intimate moments, don't share bath towels or washcloths.

If it won't interfere with the color scheme, get bath towel sets in two colors - one for you and one for your

That's the easy way to know which towel is yours. But if that does not work for you, then choose different places for your towels: yours on the towel rack and his on draped over the shower rod. Be consistent with the towel location.

When women are experiencing a BV outbreak, it is best not to wipe the vulva with a bath towel as the typical clothes washer is not a sterile machine. Another option is to use disposable soft cloths or buy a set of cheap small washcloths that are only used for this purpose.

Remember, no sharing. Why pass around an infection that is already meddling with intimacy?

## **Chapter 5: Natural Treatments for BV**

Women who have had one or more BV infections know that frustration of seeking medical treatment, taking antibiotics and finding that for all that effort and expense they are not much better off than before treatment.

### ***Value of Supplements in Treating BV***

Those who know the irritation and embarrassment of repeated BV infections are looking for other options since taking more antibiotic comes with the danger of becoming drug resistant as well as developing yeast infection or urinary tract infection or both!

For these reasons, 21<sup>st</sup> century women are not willing to accept whatever their doctors say. They are tired of having their complaints dismissed as not a big deal.

They want results and they want a say in treatment. At times that means women have to look at alternative medicine options, supplements and other lifestyle changes to control future recurrence of BV.

### ***Folic Acid***

Because of the damage that antibiotics can do to the intestinal tract, women need to be proactive in protecting their bodies. A simple way to offset this problem is to add Folic Acid supplements.

Folic acid is found naturally in green and leafy vegetables. Unfortunately with so many processed foods and vitamin-depleted foods, it can be a challenge to get enough folic acid in the typical American diet.

The best foods to choose for increasing Folic Acid in the diet are these. So be sure to add to the grocery list:

- Fresh green leafy vegetables
- Nuts, spouts and seeds
- Whole grain bread
- Bran
- Liver

- Lentils
- Asparagus
- Citrus fruits like orange, tangerine, grapefruit

The reason something as simple as eating foods with Folic acid can fight infection has to do with the way this wonderful natural substance works.

Folic acid is a key component in producing healthy red blood cells and helping the body to metabolize proteins.

According to the American Academy for Anti-Aging Medicine, Folic acid *“increases the activity and production of antibodies and may reduce susceptibility to infection.”*



Folic acid also is known to benefit heart health by lowering levels of homocysteine, an amino acid. Higher levels of homocysteine are also associated with Parkinson's disease and osteoporosis.

Women with BV are often not getting enough Folic acid either in a diet of fresh foods and whole grains or by supplements. The same infection fighting properties that Folic acid has for other diseases also applies to supporting the immune system in battling BV.

The American Academy for Anti-Aging Medicine recommends 400 micrograms of Folic acid combined with a B-complex vitamin daily. Women who are attempting to Women who are breastfeeding need to consume up to 500 micrograms of Folic Acid daily.

As with any supplement, pregnant and breastfeeding women need to discuss this with their OB/GYN specialist before adding any supplements to their daily routine.

Even with vitamins, more is not always better, so don't decide to take an excess of Folic Acid as a quick cure for BV. The National Academy of

Sciences warns that doubling the adult normal dose of 400 to 800 may be used for a short period with proper medical supervision.

But in no case is it wise to go over 1,000 micrograms daily as this can create additional medical complications for no greater benefit.

### ***Lactobacillus Acidophilus***

That's a big title for a small, yet power type of good bacteria. Remember that one of the best defenses against harmful bacterial infections like BV is having enough good bacteria in your body.

In the grocery store, you can find acidophilus milk, which is the best choice for people who have difficulty digesting regular pasteurized milk. The lactobacillus acidophilus element is also in yogurt, which are often labeled "probiotics."

Women who do not like milk or yogurt can still get the benefits of probiotic dairy products by using acidophilus capsules found in health food stores. The best way to keep a steady level of good bacteria in the body is with regular use on probiotics.

Attempting to over-load on probiotics as a fast fix for the early days of an infection is not likely to be successful and could cause problems. Some women choose to introduce acidophilus by inserting it directly into the vagina.

While stuffing yogurt up the vagina may seem disgusting to some women, it's probably no worse than dealing with the prescription vaginal creams or gels. Just clean up well or the sticky residue from the yogurt becomes as disgusting as the BV discharge.

It may smell better, but the combination of strawberry banana yogurt and BV is not appealing.

### ***Garlic***

If yogurt is sweet and sticky, garlic is quite the opposite. Yes garlic is one of nature's antibiotics. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Louis Pasteur experimented with a new idea discovered by a German chemist.

The allyl which gives garlic its distinctive and pungent odor can also stop the growth of bacteria.

Nearly one hundred years later, a Swiss pharmaceutical company, Sandoz, attempted to use the allyl in garlic to create an infection-fighting drug.

The company came up with an effective infection fighter but did not eliminate the odor so it was not marketed because researchers did not think the public would buy it.

The garlic tablets that are on the market today in health food stores have the benefits of garlic without the garlic breath. This is a kinder way to take in garlic daily rather than subject family, friends and co-workers to the eye-watering, off-putting odor.

Since garlic is effective in combating both viral and bacterial infections as well as lowering blood cholesterol, the little herb is a multi-purpose cure. If you enjoy the taste of garlic, then you can choose to eat raw garlic or add freshly chopped garlic to foods.

A few sprinkles of garlic powder on buttered bread isn't enough. You need to take in at least several cloves of fresh garlic to get the full benefit or a teaspoon of garlic powder.

### **Echinacea**

Echinacea and Golden Seal are often touted as natural remedies for reducing the impact of colds and flu virus. That's because Echinacea improves the immune system function by stimulating production of white blood cells that are necessary to fight infection.

One property of Echinacea that is particularly important for women who have BV is that it is known for effectively treating both current and recurrent infections.



Another valuable property of Echinacea is that it can be formulated as an internal treatment or external ointment.

The most efficient way to get Echinacea into the body and working on infection is to take it as a liquid extract. The liquid form is more rapidly absorbed into the blood stream than when taken in a capsule or tablet form.

In general, Echinacea is a safe, non-toxic herb to use. Since Echinacea boosts the immune system the only disadvantage is that this effect can become harmful for people who have autoimmune disorder.

### ***Beta Carotene***

As a type of Vitamin A, beta-carotene is necessary for production of the collagen that supports skin structure and cartilage for strong bones. Beta-carotene is also an antioxidant.

High levels of beta-carotene are associated with ovarian health, which is important for women who are attempting to get pregnant. When beta-carotene is low, the ovaries are prone to infection, which can result in infertility. In the same way, beta-carotene supports the overall immune system function and the maintenance of normal mucus in the vaginal environment.

Beta-carotene is often combined with Vitamin E in capsule form that is found at the health food stores.

### ***Vitamin C***

Vitamin C is much more than a delicious glass of fresh orange juice; it is also important for immune system function. Like beta-carotene, Vitamin C is necessary in the formation of collagen, which is the foundation for skin, ligaments and tendons.



Talking about collagen seems more like a discussion during a facial at the spa, but it's so much more than that.

The reason that collagen strength is important to BV is that healthy skin is more resistant to bacteria than weak skin.

Strong connective tissues are a secondary defense against infections that pass through the skin.

Stopping the spread of any infection gives the body's immune system time to launch a successful attack on the invading bacteria.

Now you know, healthy skin is about more than looking good, it's also a measure of overall health and resistance to infection which is vital in eliminating the reoccurrence of BV.

### **Myrrh**

Yes, myrrh is something that most Americans only know about from the lyrics of a holiday carol. But in the Middle East and Africa, myrrh grows as a bush and is common among herbal remedies. The gum resin from myrrh is used in the Middle East for upset stomachs and respiratory infections.

Myrrh fights infections by stimulating the white blood cells whose job is to search and destroy bad bacteria. Taken by liquid extract, myrrh can be used to treat sinusitis, sore throats, bronchitis and flu. In some herbal formulas, myrrh can be combined with Echinacea for a one-two punch against bad bacteria.

### **Marigold**

These beautiful bright yellow and orange flowers are as good for the body as they are pleasant to the eyes. Marigolds have been used for centuries to treat infections because of their natural anti-inflammatory and anti-fungal properties.

You might be surprised to learn that marigold extract is found in many cosmetics, body creams and natural soaps. Marigold can be taken in the form of a tea or a liquid extract.

These flowers are so safe that you could pinch off several marigolds from the flower bush and place in a tea infuser to steep in hot water. Then you can drink the marigold tea or use the marigold infused water to soak into a plain cloth and apply to the vaginal area for relief.

A green thumb isn't necessary for this option - you can get fresh marigold teas at a natural foods store.

### **Tea Tree Oil**

An herbal wonder from the land down under, Tea Tree Oil comes from an Australian plant. In the outback, the leaves of the tea tree have been used for generations to treat burns and skin infections.

The healing property in tea tree oil is the terpenoid, which has both anti-fungal and anti-microbial characteristics. For this reason, tea tree oil is a popular element in ointments for Athlete's foot, toenail fungus, dandruff, eczema, lice and acne.

Tea tree oil has also been found effective in treating BV and other vaginal infections. While tea tree oil is available in a liquid form, it must never be taken internally by mouth in that form. The tea tree oil extract that is found in toothpaste or mouthwash is sufficiently diluted to be safe for consumption.

As a treatment for BV, tea tree oil is best used in an ointment applied directly to the vaginal area. Another option is tea tree suppositories that are made for vaginal insert. Only use products made for internal insertion. Don't take external tea tree oil and insert directly into the vagina.

### **Zinc**

Zinc is a mineral that's commonly used in throat lozenges and over-the-counter medications to combat colds and flu. According to the National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements, there is a minimum daily requirement of zinc for all ages from infancy thru adulthood.

Zinc is important for cellular metabolism, wound healing and strong immune system.

While zinc is found in many foods, oysters contain the highest milligrams per serving over any other food.

Red meats, poultry, nuts, beans and dairy provide lower amounts per serving but are the most common dietary intake of zinc.

When the body is low in zinc, the immune system is weakened. Without adequate amounts of zinc, the T-lymphocytes don't swing into action like the killer cells they were designed to be.

People who have low zinc are also more prone to develop various types of infections and pneumonia.



With zinc, too much of a good thing becomes harmful. Be careful to take only the daily requirement for age and gender. The daily requirement of zinc also changes for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

One caution: zinc can interact with antibiotics, so don't continue taking zinc with prescription antibiotics without approval from the prescribing physician.

If zinc and certain antibiotics are in the digestive tract at the same time, they counter-act each other so that both the zinc and the antibiotic become useless. That's like making twice the effort for zero results.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005, the best way to get regular zinc in the safest way is with a diet rich in:

- Lean red meat
- Poultry
- Fish
- Eggs
- Nuts – cashews and almonds

- Whole grains
- Milk and dairy products
- Zinc fortified cereal
- Chickpeas
- Fresh green leafy vegetables

Some multi-vitamins contain zinc so carefully evaluate the amount of zinc you get from daily vitamins before deciding how much additional zinc to take as part of the natural plan to manage BV.

### **Green Tea**

Even more than black tea or oolong tea, green tea is loaded with antioxidant properties. Green tea is a rarity in that it's something medicinal that also tastes delicious.

Widely researched as an immune system booster, green tea also delivers relief from irritable bowel syndrome, stomach upset, herpes simplex and helps to regular blood sugar for persons with diabetes.

The anti-viral properties of green tea are also used as an element in an external cream or ointment applied to cuts, cold sores, acne and other skin infections.

In tropical climates, green tea bags are used for sunburn. After the tea is brewed and cooled, the tea bags are applied to the skin. The tannin in the tea brings soothing relief that diminishes the itching and reduces peeling of sunburned skin.

If you dislike the strong odor of over-the-counter sunburn creams, then green tea bags are great; drink the tea to stimulate the body's ability to heal the skin from within and apply to the painful areas on the skin surface.

Applying moist tea bags to the vaginal area might feel soothing but could be too much warmth and moisture. Instead look for an organic vaginal cream or gel that contains green tea or dap on concentrated green tea to the vulva, then dry off.

Green tea does contain caffeine so unless you get a decaf green tea, avoid drinking the tea before bedtime. If you are sensitive to caffeine or have anemia, you will want to drink less than the 10 cups a day that can otherwise be enjoyed.

### **Aloe Vera**



Inside this humble cactus is a powerful, natural gel substance with broad medicinal uses.

When you break open a stem from this plant, you can squeeze out a clear gel that is a broadly effective for soothing irritants, itching and infections.

Commercially processed aloe vera is widely used in creams and ointments for burns, sunburns, cuts, scratches, rashes and insect bites. Some cooks keep a small aloe vera plant in the kitchen window as a natural treatment for quick access to treat a burn or scrape when preparing meals.

The aloe vera gel is also processed for use in internal remedies. Some vaginal creams or gels contain aloe vera, which can be applied to the vulva area for relief from the itching. The aloe vera not only provides comfort but also helps in fighting infection.

### **Be Aware of Treatment Conflicts**

Whether you choose herbal treatment or prescription antibiotics, don't combine these without knowing the possible conflicts. The information sheet that comes with prescription drugs will list both prescription and non-prescription items that may cause problems if taken with that drug.

Pay careful attention to this and call the pharmacist or physician if you aren't certain what it means.

The same warning goes for herbal treatments. Even innocent herbs when combined with prescription drugs can create the kind of chemical reaction that either boosts or destroys the prescription effect. In either case, the BV is problem enough so don't add a prescription conflict to the mix.

## **Chapter 6: BV Detox Plan - Essential Steps to Stop the Recurrent Infections**

Toxins attack your body from so many directions; internal and external. So many toxins are inherent in the environment from air and water quality to industrial pollutants to invisible chemical odors from dry cleaning hanging in the closet.

Each time the immune system is busy fighting off toxins, there are fewer forces to defend against internal infections like Bacterial Vaginosis. When women have BV or the propensity for BV, they need to do everything possible to reduce exposure to other toxins that stress the immune system.

### ***Common Sources of Environmental Toxins***

Use these lists to identify the environmental and internal toxins that you are exposed to on a regular or occasional basis.

- Air pollution
- Auto exhaust fumes
- Pesticides (outdoor and indoor)
- Fertilizers
- Ozone
- Pollen
- Perfumes
- Cleaning liquids
- Chlorine for pool cleaning
- Dust Mites
- Cigarette and cigar smoke
- Smoke from outdoor leaf burning or forest fires
- Construction or demolition sites

## ***Common Sources of Internal Toxins***

Chances are you may not have known that some of these items are toxins that over time are harmful to your overall health and well-being.

- Alcohol
- Illegal drug use
- Prescription drug abuse
- Food coloring
- Food stabilizers
- Food emulsifiers
- Food additives and preservative
- Cigarette and cigar smoking
- Mold
- Parasites
- Metal in the body (screws, plates, dental work)
- Tampons
- Hair dye
- Cosmetics
- Hormone imbalance
- Free radicals

Your three step plan for reducing toxin exposure involves:

**Step 1:** Where possible, remove toxins from your home or office.

**Step 2:** If not possible to remove the toxins, what you can do to reduce the level of exposure.

**Step 3:** Make substitutions of safe elements in place of toxins

Remember, every toxin eliminated from your body and environment helps your immune system work better, which makes you less prone to recurrent infections.

### ***Advanced Body Detox***

After making the effort to recognize and reduce the toxins around and ingested into your body, you are ready for advanced body detox. This may sound imposing, but you will find some of these are quite nice and all will leave you with a youthful, healthy glow.

As an added benefit, a healthy body is better able to resist recurrence of BV.

### **Detox Patch**

This patch is usually applied to the bottom of the feet at bedtime and left to work overnight. The components of the detox patch are designed to address specific toxin sources by alternative medicine practitioners.

The purpose of the patch is to draw out toxins that are absorbed onto the patch and later discarded. Since this detox process happens during sleep, this is an easy to use process.

### **Detox Recipes**

These are food combinations that build up the body's immune system with fresh ingredients and high quality proteins.

Get a cookbook that explains how to shop for and prepare detox menus and stock your refrigerator with healthy foods that nourish your body and help it fight bacterial vaginosis.

Even if you are busy working and commuting, plan at least one meal with detox recipes and on the weekend make it a point to increase intake of detox foods.



### **Lymphatic Drainage Massage**

This sophisticated procedure stimulates the lymph system to reduce fluids and flush out bacteria.

Because the lymph nodes are vital in the body's ability to filter out bacteria before it invades the bloodstream, the lymphatic drainage massage greatly benefits treatment for BV. As an added benefit, the relaxation from this massage reduces stress.

### **Detox Bath**

After the BV infection is under control, soaking in a detox bath can be a pleasant preventative. Treat yourself to a detox bath at a luxurious day spa. While enjoying the experience, you learn how to create this for yourself.

A basic detox bath can be duplicated at home (bring your own cozy bathrobe and candles). Use a simple combination of ingredients that can be purchased at the local grocery or health food store:

- 1 cup sea salt
- 1 cup Epsom salt
- 2 cups baking soda

Mix the dry ingredients in a bowl. Gradually add these into the water as the bath is filled. This is the best way to diffuse the salt mixture into the water.

Multiple the mixture and preserve in tightly closed glass jars for the next detox bath.

Keep the water temperature warm not hot. Epsom salt prompts sweating which stimulates the body's natural method of removing toxins. The combination of hot bath and Epsom salt can be dangerous for a woman who has high blood pressure, diabetes or heart disease.

### **Colon Detox**

Body detoxification is not complete unless the colon is detoxified. The easy way to do this is with a 7 or 10 day colon cleanse kit which you can obtain from a health food store or alternative medicine center. Follow the directions and complete the cleanse.

During the colon cleanse, follow the recommended food and drink intake precisely. After the cleanse, be prepared to replenish the good bacteria with probiotic yogurt and acidophilus dairy products or supplements.

While you may feel tired as the cleanse is in progress, you will experience a notable energy surge when the body has eliminated the excess waste and toxins.

When the colon works efficiently, the body gets rid of waste daily so that bacteria loses another of its favorite breeding grounds. Adding more fiber in your food choices is key to colon function. As a bonus, fiber is more filling so you need less to feel full.

Another way to maintain colon health is as simple as drinking more water. Those 8 glasses of water recommended for general health are also important to flush out the colon and provide smooth transit thru the intestines so nutrients are absorbed and waste is discarded.

Too often, women who have recurrent BV also have chronic constipation, which is a symptom of poor colon condition.

### **Liver Detox**

The liver is a hard working organ that gets slammed daily by pollutants, medications, caffeine, smoke and other internal toxins. Add to that the poor quality of the typical American diet and the workload of the liver

goes unnoticed until it shuts down and then it's a potentially life-threatening problem.

Choose a liver detox kit from the health food store or alternative medicine center. The process is similar to that for the colon cleanse. The only caution is that you cannot do these simultaneously. Complete the colon cleanse and wait the amount of time recommended on the product before starting the liver cleanse.

Detoxification of the body is not a one-time event. Since toxins continually assault the body, you need to make detox procedures an ongoing part of your proactive approach to health.

Make an appointment with yourself and put it on your day calendar. For example, choose a relaxing weekend to begin your colon or liver cleanse. Schedule quarterly lymphatic drainage massages.

Put an "away" message on your computer and turn off the cell phone while you take a detox bath, dry off, then sit outdoors and enjoy some well deserved quiet time.

## Chapter 7: BV Free Lifestyle - How to Get There and Stay There

When you are plagued by Bacterial Vaginosis symptoms all you can think of is how you would do almost anything for relief. You are surfing the Internet for information, talking with your girlfriends and taking time off for doctor's appointments.

With a fraction as much effort, you can start to live a BV free lifestyle. Instead of frantically searching for a cure, you are better off to establish conditions that eliminate recurrence of BV.

Take another look at the list of internal and external toxins in Chapter 6. Make two copies of this page to use in your evaluation.

Choose the top 5 internal toxins to which you are regularly exposed and list each in the table below. Rate your progress in dealing with these internal toxins as Improved or Needs Improvement.

<b>Internal Toxins</b>	<b>Improved</b>	<b>Needs improvement</b>	<b>Action plan</b>

For each item that you rated as "needs improvement," list a few ideas in the Action Plan for how you will deal with this toxin. The action plan might include obtaining more information or research, consulting with an alternative medicine practitioner or nutritionist, eliminating unhealthy habits with smoking cessation program or weight loss plan.

The action plan must be ideas that you generate and that you are willing to tackle. Notice that this is not a wish list or a goals list, this is an Action Plan, which means you have to put some action to the words, or nothing changes.

Now repeat the process by choosing the top 5 external toxins to which you are regularly exposed and list each in the table below. Rate your progress in dealing with these internal toxins as Improved or Needs Improvement.

External Toxins	Improved	Needs improvement	Action plan

For each item that you rated as “needs improvement,” list a few ideas in the Action Plan for how you will deal with this toxin.

The action plan might include changing your transportation method, more frequent change of air system filters in your home, avoiding restaurants and public places where there is exposure to second hand smoke or changing from pesticides to natural gardening elements for the outdoor plants as well as indoor plants.

***The Big “S” Isn’t for Superwoman***

Women who have BV tend to be busy, productive workers, professionals, mothers and students who take push multi-tasking to the limit. When busy becomes the norm, the added pressure puts a strain on the physical and emotional health, both of which can compromise the immune system ability to fight infection.

The “S” words are stress and sleep. To live a BV free lifestyle, women have to pay attention to these critical issues.

**Stress** is well researched as the pre-condition for disease. A body under constant stress abuses the adrenaline system with repeated pressure to go beyond reasonable limits.

That is negative stress, which leads to headaches, irritability, high blood pressure, stroke, auto accidents and industrial accidents. There is simply nothing useful about this kind of stress.

Positive stress is more like anticipation or excitement; the way you feel as a bride, starting college, new mother, first day on the job or signing a mortgage for your first home. This type of stress is temporary and manageable.

Yes, negative stressors happen, often when least expected. That’s why you can’t fret over everything or hook into other people’s crises to the

point that you have no endurance when a stressor hits you. Learning to manage stress is important in living a BV free lifestyle.

**Sleep** deprivation is a serious problem for many women. Because they are stressed with so much to do, they stay up late and get up early. Stop fooling yourself that it's okay to exist on 4-5 hours a sleep at night if you "make it up on the weekends." Sleep deprivation adds up and the damage to your body occurs a little more each day.



To remain healthy an adult female needs 8-9 hours of sleep every night.

That means turning off the television, computer and cell phone at least half hour before bedtime.

Take a bath and relax before bedtime so your body can wind down from a

busy day.

Don't go to sleep with the television or radio turned on. If you want music, choose a CD with instrumental only, no vocals.

Establish a routine time for bed and time to get up in the morning. Sleeping an extra hour on the weekend is fine just don't vary the times drastically. If you do, you make it harder to follow the sleep pattern when the workweek rolls around.

Avoid exercise, house cleaning, sports or other strenuous activities near bedtime. Don't think that surfing the Internet is less strenuous. While you may be seated, your mind is running a marathon to keep up with all that input.

Shut down the laptop and make a rule not to work online while in bed. The bed is for sleeping and other intimate pursuits.

### ***Become a Picky Consumer***

Because Bacterial Vaginosis can be affected by otherwise innocent appearing consumer products like soaps and scents, you must become a

picky consumer. In this case, picky means carefully reading labels and buying the least toxic product.

Some chemicals to avoid in products used on the body are:

- Propylene glycol
- Alcohol
- Menthyl benzethonium chloride
- Artificial coloring
- Sodium lauryl sulfate

Also look for “green” products. Detergents, soaps, lotions and sprays that are environmentally friendly are also non-toxic. As the consumer demand increased, more “green” products are found even at grocery stores and discount retailers. You no longer have to go across town to a health food store to get non-toxic products for home and personal use.

Look for products that are hypoallergenic and fragrance free. These products are also made from primarily natural ingredients, which is good for your body and environmentally friendly as the same time.

Practice safe sex by using condoms, preferably plain varieties. Condoms that contain spermicides, lubricants or fragrances introduce substances into the vagina that upset the balance of good bacteria to bad bacteria.

If vaginal dryness makes sex uncomfortable (particularly after a BV outbreak), choose a natural lubricant from a health food store or alternative medicine center. Natural or organic products give the comfort you want without the chemicals you don't want.

Living a BV free lifestyle is a woman's best protection against infection that could lead to serious consequences like Pelvic Inflammatory Disease. Women need to take control of their health decisions and get away from dependence on prescription antibiotics. Those drugs are not the answer - prevention of BV is the real answer.

By identifying and reducing or eliminating the internal and external toxins, taking reasonable health precautions, practicing safe sex and building up overall health, any woman can live a BV free lifestyle.

Instead of spending all that money on physician appointments and drugs, spend it on shoes.

Instead of taking off work for medical appointments, take the day off to spend at a spa.

Instead of making excuses to avoid intimacy when the BV outbreak is slimy and smelly, light the candles and set out a trail of rose petals that lead your partner to the bedroom.

That's the difference it makes to lead a BV free lifestyle.



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