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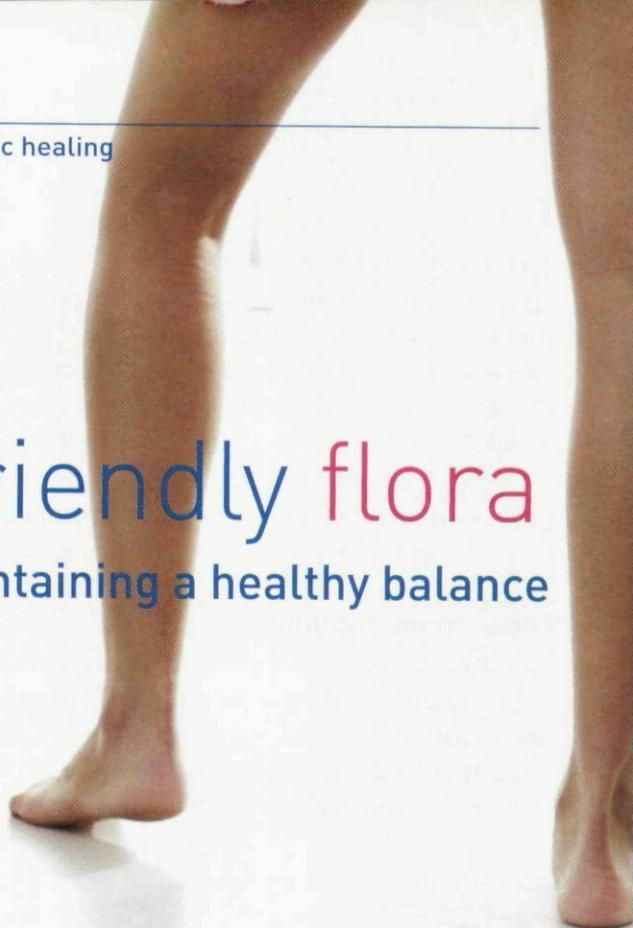
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holistic healing

Friendly flora Maintaining a healthy balance



Patrick Quaille

At some point in her life, nearly every woman will experience a vaginal infection. The type of infection and frequency with which it occurs depends heavily on the health of the vagina.

The typical treatment for vaginal infections is short-term antibiotic or antifungal therapy. While these treatments are generally effective, they do little to treat the underlying cause—the proliferation of pathogenic bacteria and candida. Because of this, chronic, frequent recurrences are common. The key is to address the conditions that allow pathogenic bacteria and candida to flourish.

The perfect environment

First, it is important to understand that a healthy vagina is rich in lactic bacteria (commonly known as probiotics or acidophilus). Having large quantities of these “friendly flora” keeps this region moderately acidic (ideal vaginal pH is less than 5).

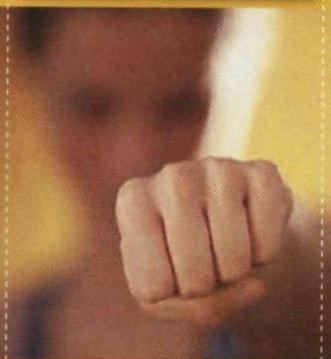
This acidic environment forms a protective barrier against harmful bacteria, fungi, and other pathogens. This acidic barrier is also critical in preventing destructive bacteria from reaching and infecting the fallopian tubes and ovaries where a bacterial infection can lead to infertility.

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When the balance shifts

As vital as the creation and maintenance of this protective barrier is, it can be weakened or rendered almost nonexistent by any number of external influences such as antibiotics and sulfonamides, contraceptives (both oral and topical), medicated douches, certain vaginal medications, and diabetes. If the balance of friendly flora is altered, the entire region is left almost defenseless against a host of invading pathogens.

In the past, a commonly recommended home treatment for vaginal infections was to apply yogourt directly into the vagina. While sound in theory, it has met with limited success since most conventional yogourt contains too few probiotics and too much added sugar to be of any value.

How do probiotics work?

Probiotics convert sugars into lactic acid, the growth medium for lactic bacteria, which restores a healthy, protective pH. This assists in the proliferation and recolonization of friendly vaginal flora. Since candida feeds on sugar, its conversion into lactic bacteria effectively robs yeast of its growth medium and creates an inhospitable environment for it. Finally, probiotics actively suppress both pathogenic bacteria and *Candida albicans*.

In a study conducted by the Department of Microbiology and Gynecology at the Prague University Hospital, 40 patients with vaginal infections were divided into two groups and given two different treatments. The first group was treated conventionally. The second was also treated conventionally, but with the addition of a probiotic suppository. In the short term (five to six weeks), both treatments were equally successful (95 percent). However, by two to four months after ending treatment, the differences became strikingly clear: The success rate of the conventional-only group slipped to 82 percent, while the group which included probiotic therapy remained absolutely unchanged at 95 percent.

Check your local natural health store for products that help to acidify the vagina while encouraging probiotic proliferation in order to maintain a "friendly flora" environment. **a**

Patrick Quaile is a health researcher with over 23 years experience in the functional food industry.

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