



NOW WE'RE TALKIN'

It's not traditional water-cooler convo, but shouldn't sexual rejuvenation be out of the shadows by now? Tamsin Marshall puts it out there

There are two types of girlfriend in this world: those who freely discuss their nether regions and those who don't. Obviously, there's no right or wrong, but it can be a good thing to share our experiences of our most private of parts with our closest friends. Myriad problems can occur in this complex area of our anatomy, but there are a number of treatments being proven to remedy them. We've rounded up a tried-and-tested trio that should be anything but taboo.



STEAM ME UP

When Gwyneth Paltrow declared herself to be a fan of vaginal steaming, the world responded with ridicule, but the actress isn't the only one to sing its praises. Vaginal steaming is a holistic approach for those who suffer from a variety of abdominal problems, including reproductive and digestive issues, and has actually been used for thousands of years in various cultures, predominantly in Central America – it's said to have been favoured by Mayan healers.

Rosanna Marks performs vaginal steaming at Auckland clinic Aroha Healing. For best results, she combines it with abdominal massage. "It's a really soothing and relaxing treatment," she says. "Being shamanic, it works on every level: emotional, spiritual and physical. If there's been any trauma to the vagina – from sexual abuse to a smear test gone wrong – we can help cleanse and remove the different memories we believe are held in the tissue. Shamans believe the women's second brain is the uterus."

Rosanna goes further by explaining that she's certain the many chemicals we expose ourselves to have a part to play in the increase in endometriosis, polycystic ovaries and reproductive issues. "There's a link to all of that; if we alter the hormonal structure in that system, problems flare up. Periods shouldn't be extremely painful."

Vaginal steaming is a simple treatment. Rosanna seats clients on a custom-made padded seat, not unlike a toilet seat. Steam rises from a bowl underneath that is prepared with herbs and other medicinal plants prescribed during the consultation. Each concoction is unique to the individual. "We often forget about this important, sacred area," says Rosanna, "but every time I walk back into the room after a steam, I notice women's faces look different – stress is taken away."

Clients from all over the country visit Rosanna, and if continued at-home treatment is recommended, she sends them away with a personalised blend of dried organic herbs. She recommends this for women undergoing IVF. "If they can't come in [to the clinic] before they go for an IVF treatment, I encourage them to steam at home that morning. It softens the tissues and I've had clients tell me that their doctors have said it's a text-book procedure when women have a steam first."

BLOOD LUST

As effective as the Vampire Facial is for our visages, it's increasingly proven to work a treat in other areas too.

At Auckland's The Face Place, the O-Shot treatment sees platelet-rich-plasma (PRP) injected into the vaginal area to help repair and rejuvenate the tissue, increase blood flow and improve sensitivity. All in just five to 10 minutes.

"The O-Shot was discovered by Dr Charles Runels about eight years ago and was originally used to help improve orgasm, lubrication and sensitivity," explains The Face Place's Dr Catherine Stone. "As other clinicians have provided more treatments, other positive side effects have been discovered, such as treating a leaky bladder and painful sex, reducing urinary urgency, improving a devastating [skin] condition called lichen sclerosus and reducing the pain from vaginal mesh repair [operations]."

Results for a leaky bladder can be immediate or noticeable within the week, while other benefits are seen three to six weeks after

treatment and can continue to improve for three to six months. In an extension of the O-Shot, extra PRP can be injected into the labia to improve the appearance of the genitals.

"Almost anyone can have this treatment, because we're using the healing parts of your own blood, making it one of the safest injectable treatments available," says Dr Stone. "The best candidates have a mild to moderately leaky bladder, or have noticed a change in sensation or lubrication after childbirth or menopause. The O-Shot can also be an effective treatment for women who are unable to orgasm."

HEAT WAVES

You know once it's been mentioned by the Kardashian clan that it's going to become a thing. The "vaginal lasering thing" they talked about last year on *Kocktails with Khloe* is ThermiVa, initially trialled in New Zealand at The Face Place and now a permanent fixture on their treatment menu.

ThermiVa uses radio frequency to heat the internal and external tissues with a specialised slimline wand. It tightens internally and externally, increases sensation and lubrication, and helps improve a leaky bladder and urinary urgency. More than just another cosmetic procedure, some women consider it revolutionary in tackling their medical problems.

Karen* is in her mid-60s and had vaginal surgery to repair a prolapse nearly a decade ago. She has since suffered pain during intercourse and urinary incontinence severe enough that she had to wear a pad every day. Karen had the O-Shot followed by ThermiVa six weeks later and says it turned her health around. "The O-Shot has been life-changing, with a marked reduction in pain and improvement in my stress incontinence, and the ThermiVa has made such a difference to our sexual intimacy. I've been able to climax for the first time since I had surgery nine years ago."

Cynthia* became intrigued about ThermiVa when she started to experience uncomfortable side effects from the hormone suppression therapy she had during her treatment for breast cancer. "I was in my late 20s when I was diagnosed with cancer, so when the hormone suppression started, my body was thrown into an early induced menopause. Vaginal atrophy [a thinning, drying and inflammation of tissue due to reduced oestrogen]

became a very uncomfortable and real concern for me. I went to see Dr Stone and we decided that the best treatment for me would be the O-Shot, followed by a course of three ThermiVa sessions. They all went smoothly and the pain factor was low.

"During ThermiVa, if it became too hot I would inform the nurse who would drop the temperature instantly for immediate relief. The results for my vaginal atrophy have been absolutely fantastic. Before the treatments, I experienced dryness, discomfort and pain during intercourse, which affected me on an emotional level as well, as sex is such an important part of nurturing a healthy relationship and feeling connected to someone. I started to notice results almost straight away – without a doubt it has boosted my confidence and changed my life." ■

*Names have been changed.

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