

## Vaginal (Yoni) Steam

Vaginal steams have a long history of use by traditional healers in various parts of the world, especially in Korea and Central America. Their popularity has been steadily growing in the West, and for good reason – vaginal steams are very beneficial for a wide variety of conditions, from painful menstrual cramps to infertility to vaginal infections and imbalance in the tissues. They can help the uterus empty itself more completely, dredging out old tissue and blood that may have been there for months or even years. From an Ayurvedic perspective, yoni steams are deeply hydrating to the tissues, grounding and enhance a downward flow (apana vayu) necessary for vital reproductive health.

The process is simple. A big pot of tea is prepared and placed under a chair or inside an empty and drained toilet. You sit over the pot, naked from the waist down, with your legs slightly open, so that the steam from the pot of tea will come up to your genitals. The steam will carry the medicinal benefits and volatile oils of the plants to the mucus membranes, which will readily absorb them into your bloodstream. This will have a healing effect on both your external and internal organs. You can achieve different actions based on the herbs that you use in the tea, and the heat from the steam itself has a healing, warming effect on the womb.

### Instructions to prepare a vaginal steam

You will need:

- A chair with slots so steam can pass through or an emptied out toilet
- Pot or bowl that fits under the chair or inside the toilet.
- 2 warm blankets
- Herbal tea that has been cooked on the stove
- Towel to place under pot of herbs if on the floor
- Quiet, private location where you will be undisturbed for 30 minutes.

To prepare the tea, bring 1 gallon of purified water to a boil in a big pot. Turn off the heat, and add the herbs into the pot. Only use fresh or dried herbs for your vaginal steam. You want to use about 1 cup of dried herbs for 1 gallon of water. If you are planning to use 3 herbs for your steam, you would use approximately 1/3 cup of each. Mix the herbs into the water, making sure they are submerged, and cover with a lid immediately. Allow the herbs to steep for 5 to 10 minutes maximum, then carry your pot over to your designated location, while still covered.

Get naked from the waist down, but keep some warm socks on. Staying warm during the steam is important. You may even start to sweat, and that's a good thing! Place the pot underneath the chair, or inside the toilet, uncover it, and sit above it on your chair or toilet seat. Test the warmth of the steam to make sure it isn't too hot for you. Wait a few minutes if it feels too hot. If the steam feels good, go ahead and sit down, wrap your lower body with a big blanket, so that you are creating a little steam room with the pot in the middle. Make sure there are no gaps anywhere, that the blanket touches the ground and doesn't go in the pot. Use the second blanket to cover your upper body. Sit and enjoy your steam for 20-30 minutes, relaxing, listening to music, reading, or meditating.

If you feel dizzy or light headed at any point while doing a steam, uncover yourself to cool down a bit. If dizziness persists, remove the blankets and pull out the pot from underneath you. Inducing sweating can aid in the process, but you can do a steam with only your lower body covered if you do not wish to get overheated. It is important, however, not to do a vaginal steam in a cold room or near cold drafts.

Please note that your bleeding time may be slightly different following vaginal steam – bleeding could be heavier, there could be more clots in your blood, or your blood could be thicker, almost like dark syrup. Do not be alarmed. This is normal, and is a good reaction to the cleansing effects of the steam. It is also possible for your blood to come a day or two early.

### **When to do vaginal steams**

General recommendation is to do a vaginal steam for 3 days in a row, about one week before your cycle is due. It is best to do them later in the evening so that you can go to bed shortly after finishing the steam. You can do the 3-day routine of vaginal steams once a year for maintenance, or every cycle for deep rooted issues.

### **Which herbs to use**

For vaginal steams, the herbs can be used dried or fresh, if available. Note that you should never use essential oils in vaginal steams. Always choose organic or wild plants, when possible. The French Broad Food Coop and the Herbiary in downtown Asheville both have a good selection of bulk herbs.

*Motherwort*: Tonifies the reproductive system and increases circulation to the pelvis. Balances hormones.

*Mugwort*: Cleansing – physically and spiritually. Balances hormones. Can help bring on menses.

*Yarrow*: Astringent. Cleansing. Antibacterial. Good for infections.

*Oregano*: Best herb to bring on menses. Uterine stimulant. Increases low, inadequate menstrual flow. Antiseptic. Prevent infections. (Can use fresh oregano for a stronger effect.)

*Lavender*: Super relaxing herb, calms the spirit, mind and body. Antispasmodic. Nourishing to the nervous system. Emollient, very soothing to irritated tissues.

*Marigold / Calendula*: Cleansing, induces perspiration of tissues. Very healing for irritated skin or scars. Activates the lymph. Gentle energy.

*Rosemary*: Increases circulation to the pelvis, clears out old blood and fluids. Antiseptic and very cleansing. Brings concentration and focused energy.

*Sage*: Astringent. Spiritually cleansing. Release emotional and energetic blockages.

*Basil*: Can bring on menses. Reduces menstrual cramps. Antibacterial. Blesses the woman receiving the steam. Spiritually cleansing.

*Rose petals*: Relaxing and uplifting. Mildly astringent. Increases self-love, releases stuck emotions.

*Chamomile*: Relaxing, calms the mind. Soothing to the vaginal tissues. Anti-inflammatory.

### **Addressing specific conditions**

Stears can assist in healing a wide variety of gynecological issues. They are very effective at enhancing fertility, and assisting in postpartum recovery. You can work with just one plant, or a combination of herbs. As with any use of herbal medicine, you can achieve a broader effect by combining the actions and energies of several plants.

Here are some suggested formulas that can help you address specific situations, keeping in mind that for more serious conditions, vaginal steams should be part of a larger healing protocol in order to affect lasting change:

Long / irregular cycles: *Oregano, basil, and mugwort*. Helps bring on the blood.

Scanty bleeding: *Rosemary, oregano, and motherwort*.

Painful menstrual cramps: *Motherwort, basil, and lavender*.

Enhance fertility: *Oregano, motherwort, and rosemary*. Steam 3 days starting at the end of menstruation. Repeat the week before menses is due.

PCOS / Ovarian cysts: *Rosemary, motherwort and lavender*.

Endometriosis: *Oregano, motherwort, yarrow, and rose petals*.

Fibroids: *Motherwort, basil and calendula*. Can be done every 2 weeks, but contraindicated if there is very heavy flooding menses.

Adhesions / blocked fallopian tubes: *Oregano, rosemary, and mugwort*.

Bladder / vaginal infections: *Yarrow, oregano, lavender and calendula*. Steam 2 days, wait a few days, if symptoms persist, repeat. If symptoms appear to worsen, discontinue.

Postpartum: *Oregano, calendula, motherwort, and basil*. Steam 3 days within 9 days of the vaginal birth. Okay if bleeding. Check with your midwife first. Wait at least 6 weeks after a cesarean section birth.

Perineal tear / scars / episiotomy: *Calendula, lavender and yarrow*. Wait until wounds are closed and stitches have been removed.

Menopause: *Rosemary, oregano, and motherwort*. Steam several times after the end of cyclical bleeding. Helps empty out the uterus completely before bleeding stops for good.

Menopausal dryness: *Lavender, calendula, and chamomile*.

### **Contraindications/Situations where vaginal steams should be avoided:**

- While bleeding
- During a fever
- While pregnant, or if there is any possibility of pregnancy
- With an IUD
- With extremely heavy flooding menses
- With any open any open cuts / wounds / stitches
- During a herpes outbreak