

FULL STEAM AHEAD

VAGINAL STEAMING A GROWING SPA TREND

by RAQUEL LEVY

Finding its origins in centuries-old Korean, South and Central American traditions, vaginal steaming is the oldest new way to relax and detox. Referred to as “chai-yok” in Korea and “yoni steaming” in other parts of the world, v-steaming boasts benefits fitting of the yoni name, which is a Sanskrit word for “womb” or “origin of life.” Bloggers, holistic therapists and spa professionals alike praise v-steaming for its relaxation properties, ability to relieve menstrual cramps, regulate cycles and in some cases even treat infertility.

Vaginal steaming quickly gained popularity after being featured on Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle publication, "Goop," which enjoys a cult following of nearly one million subscribers. Paltrow, actress turned lifestyle guru, praised the v-steam for being "an energetic release... that balances female hormone levels." V-steaming was also seen on an episode of "Tia and Tamera" where the Mowry sisters are recommended the treatment for its postpartum benefits, particularly for revitalizing sex after baby. After the treatment, Tamara exclaimed she felt "invigorated."

Clients who receive v-steam treatments say they feel instantly relaxed and want to go back for more. The warm steam of completely natural ingredients is absorbed directly into the body through the pores, producing a long list of reported mental and physical health benefits.

BENEFITS

Many v-steams contain mugwort and wormwood as its main ingredients, as they both have antibacterial and antifungal properties. Mugwort is also known in Korea for maintaining internal health and keeping skin looking young and healthy. This gentle steam, combined with other natural ingredients, warms and relaxes while rising up to cleanse the uterus and release toxins. Because of this, many clients have listed several advantages to v-steaming.

Relieves menstrual cramps and helps regulate irregular or absent monthly cycles

Reduces bloating and exhaustion caused by menstruation

Maintains uterine health by protecting the uterus from ulcers and tumors, helps fight infections and kills intestinal worms

Strengthens the nervous system

Assists with the healing of hemorrhoid discomfort in both men and women

Post-partum healing and toning of the uterus and vagina

Eases fatigue, headaches, abdominal discomfort and nausea

Can help treat ovarian cysts, vaginal/yeast infections, uterine weakness and uterine prolapse

Relieve symptoms of menopause

Soothes and warms the body

Though not yet scientifically verified, countless client testimonials and centuries of practice speak for themselves. Niki Han Schwarz, owner of Goop-recommended Tikkun Holistic Spa in Santa Monica told the Los Angeles Times it was chai-yok that helped her conceive at the age of 45 after three years of trying.

HOW IT WORKS

The most important aspects of a vaginal steam are its natural ingredients. It is recommended to only use fresh or dry herbs, as essential oils are too strong and may cause irritation.

Approximately 14-20 ingredients, often imported from Korea or China, go into making a relaxing vaginal steam:

Mugwort and wormwood are used to fight infections, balance hormones and reduce menstrual cramping

Rosemary and yarrow regulate menstrual flow, heal wounds and can treat ovarian cysts

"IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE WARY OF SANITIZATION WHEN OFFERING VAGINAL STEAMS. HPV CAN LIVE ON THE SURFACES OF OBJECTS FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME."

Partridge berry is also known for decreasing menstrual pain and treating infertility

Motherwort strengthens and relaxes the uterine muscles to ease cramping

Calendula aids in healing hemorrhoids and vaginal tears and, for that relaxation feeling, lavender and rose petals are wonderful for pampering

A v-steam session is prepared by infusing these ingredients in a pot of boiling water. Once it's the right temperature, the client sits over it on a stool with an opening to allow the steam to enter through the vaginal canal. Placing a blanket or tented

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cover over the lower body helps keep the steam in and prevents the client from feeling exposed. The treatment takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

SAFETY CONCERNS

It's important to be wary of sanitization when offering vaginal steams. Nicholas LeRoy, DC, MS, founder of the Illinois Center for Progressive Health, told Chicago Health that hygiene is his primary concern with v-steaming. "HPV can live on the surfaces of objects for long periods of time," he says. He recommends a disposable lining, or fresh towels placed on the seat. The temperature of the steam is also something to be cautious with, as boiling the water too hot can cause burning.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Though women of all ages can relax with some steam, clients who are pregnant or think they may be pregnant should not do any type of vaginal steaming. The herbs may endanger the pregnancy by affecting hormone levels, causing uterine contractions and even inducing labor. V-steams are also not recommended for women with an IUD (Intrauterine Device). The treatment is best taken seven days before or after menstruation, but never during. If a client has any type of internal infection, fever, or open cuts/sores, she is encouraged to wait until it has passed and the wounds have closed or healed.

VAGINAL STEAMING IN SPAS

Tikkun Holistic Spa

Tikkun Signature V-Steam

30 min: \$50 | Series of 5: \$200

Their signature v-steam promotes circulation, stimulates the production of hormones, regulates menstrual cycles and clears up hormonal acne.

Chicago King Spa & Sauna

V-Steam Herb

1: \$30 | 10: \$250

Widely used by women in Korea, Japan and China, this sitz bath strengthens the womb, prevents uterine cancer, yeast infections and vaginal itching. For guests who especially request it, an additional packet of 12 medicinal herbs and dried centipede eases pre-menstrual pain.

Juvenex Spa NYC

Gyno Spa Cure

30 min: \$75 | 12 Sessions: \$750-

This treatment uses healing herbs to restore optimal health to the vaginal passage, an ancient Asian remedy used for centuries.

Raquel Levy is the editorial associate at Les Nouvelles Esthétiques & Spa. She holds a bachelor's degree in Communications with an emphasis in writing and editing. Levy has been a lifestyle and feature writer for more than five years. Contact her at raquel@lneonline.com.