

# ALL ABOUT THE V

Vaginal health is an important part of our overall well-being. Here, our experts answer eight questions you've always wanted to ask - but never dared to.

BY DELLE CHAN

## OUR EXPERTS:



**Dr Tony Tan**, specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology, and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre



**Dr Christopher Ng**, gynaecologist at Gynae MD Women's & Rejuvenation Clinic



**Dr Jazlan Joosoph**, specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology, and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre



**Dr Cordelia Han**, specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology, and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre

## How do I know if my discharge is normal?

"While vaginal discharge is usually colourless and not associated with itchiness or smells, it differs from woman to woman. Also, vaginal discharge varies with ovulation and childbirth," shares Dr Tony Tan, specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology, and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre.

Be alert to unusual changes in the smell, colour, quantity or texture of your vaginal discharge, as this might signal an infection. Dr Christopher Ng, gynaecologist at Gynae MD Women's & Rejuvenation Clinic, warns: "You should see a gynaecologist if your discharge has a smelly odour, is yellowish or greenish in colour, or has the consistency of cottage cheese. You should also let your gynae know if you experience abnormal bleeding or spotting that is not related to your period."

## What is a healthy vagina supposed to smell like?

Does the smell from your vagina make your nose crinkle? According to Dr Ng, it's normal for your vagina to have a slight odour. "However, a strong, fishy smell might suggest that you're suffering from an infection called bacterial vaginosis, which is caused by an overgrowth of normally occurring vaginal bacteria," he says. "A strong odour is also associated with sexually transmitted infections like trichomoniasis."

## Are infections common? How can they be treated?

Most women will experience at least one vaginal infection in their lifetime, says Dr Ng. Dr Jazlan Joosoph, specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology, and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre, observes that vaginal infections are very common and usually affect young women who are sexually active.

Says Dr Joosoph: "Treatment will largely depend on the nature and cause of the infections. For instance, viral infections are treated with antiviral medication and bacterial infections are treated with antibiotics. However, sexually transmitted infections will involve contact tracing, whereby all sexual partners involved will need to be screened and treated."

## Is douching good or bad for the vagina?

Vaginal douching is a method of washing the vagina with water or an over-the-counter solution, by spraying it in through a tube or nozzle. "While douching might make you feel cleaner and more refreshed, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that it offers any real health benefits," notes Dr Cordelia Han, specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology, and consultant at Raffles Women's Centre. "On the contrary, the pressure of the douching fluid may push bacteria or menstrual blood back into your uterus and fallopian tubes. This can increase the risk of ailments such as pelvic inflammatory disease and endometriosis."

Douching may also destroy the "good bacteria" that contributes to the natural flora in your vagina. "This natural flora produces lactic acid, which maintains vaginal health and protects you from vaginal infections," adds Dr Han.

