

Sex-Positive, Pleasure-Oriented, Juicy-Fun Sexual Health
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First, what is sex??

(if you're in the workshop, this section is a LOT more exciting...but secret☺)

Sex really includes almost all areas of life/health when you consider the brain as our largest sex organ—almost anything we can think of can be sexy to someone; sexuality is largely socially constructed, so there are no real essential truths about sex, meaning we get to define it! *So, why not include herbs, food, scents?*

What is sexual health?

The World Health Organization defines sexual health as "a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled." (American Social Health Association)

When we talk about being sex positive, what do we mean?

A sex positive world assumes "that the appropriate and beneficial uses of sex extend beyond reproduction to include creating personal pleasure, bonding intimate relationships, promoting spiritual growth, and enhancing emotional and physical health. In a sex positive world, everyone is free to find sex lives that delight and empower them." – *Center for Sex Positive Culture (Seattle Washington)*

Sex-positive, ...is a simple yet radical affirmation that we each grow our own passions on a different medium, that instead of having two or three or even half a dozen sexual orientations, we should be thinking in terms of millions. "Sex-positive" respects each of our unique sexual profiles, even as we acknowledge that some of us have been damaged by a culture that tries to eradicate sexual difference and possibility. Even so, we grow like weeds." -*Carole Queen, Real Live Nude Girl*

Getting down to it...

Now that we're thinking about sex, we need to be thinking about what turns us on, what doesn't, why we want or don't want to have it—not analyzing, but exploring our turn-ons/offers, getting into pleasure of all kinds, being in our bodies. You always have at least one fabulous sexual partner: you. If you're not that good in bed w/yourself...get to work! You need to know what you like...

So, first we start by preparing our space and our body and mind/emotions for sex—slowing down, focusing...

Getting in the mood...

****Note re: my approach to the herbs...it's as much about the system in which they're applied as the herbs themselves. You can always come up w/many other individual herbs for any action/application, but more importantly, you have to be constitutionally appropriate and address underlying issues, contraindications, as well as your own preferences. So I'll give a few examples in each case, but by no means are these ideas meant to be exhaustive. Also, for this topic in particular, I focus on flavor and delivery being pleasurable, so not all herbs will show up here...prickly ash, you know who you are.****

Preparation is often about relaxing, so nervines are important

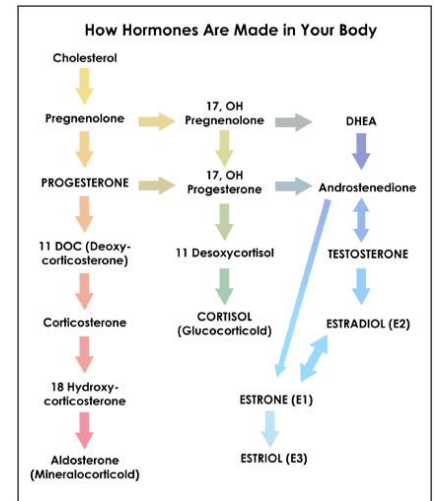
Often we just can't think about sex if we're stressed or if we are too tense, busy, not in our bodies; might also have performance anxiety or be nervous w/partner or b/c of stressful history with sex

- kava (*Piper methysticum*): lovely anxiolytic, sedates/suppresses inhibitions, has fun numbing quality—gets your attention; tincture or syrup; tea w/coconut milk; 2-5 droppers full of tincture/syrup or 1-3 g in tea; don't use regularly w/history of liver disease
- skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*): fantastic anxiolytic, esp. for "stage fright"; good b/c it's helpful for stress held in body, energetically fairly neutral, safe for all; tea or tincture; 1 teaspoon to full ounce of tincture is fine in short period; 1-3 g in tea (add rose and mint for flavor)
- passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*): for the rotating to-do list that seems more important than sex; the person w/circular thoughts as part of anxiety/tension; tea or tincture; 2-5 droppers full of tincture; 1-3 g in tea (ditto flavor enhancement needed)
- try a bath w/leaves and flowers (rose, jasmine, lavender, lemon verbena, mints?) to relax and shift gears, prepare your body and mind as temple for your own or others' worship; anoint with essential oils or scented body butters after

For way before, if stress, exhaustion/deficiency play a role:

If lack of interest or capacity to reach full pleasure are due to exhaustion or stress, think about long term adaptogen use (can especially be important during menopause); all of these herbs have impact on hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal and H-P-gonad axes, so are hormone modulators and will have the effect of supporting adrenals and liberating more resources (ie cholesterol) for reproductive vs. stress hormone synthesis (notice how in the diagram progesterone can be “highjacked” to make cortisol? We don’t even get to testosterone (so important for libido and orgasm) or estrogen!)

- Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*): core Ayurvedic herb for calming anxious and exhausted (wired and tired) person who is hypervigilant in face of stress; name refers to having the “strength of a horse”, as well as inducing sleep (somnia); given to children and those convalescing to build tissue, to mountain climbers to perform better; warm and moist; powder 1+ g/day in milk or ghee w/spices; tincture 2-5ml (1:3)
- Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*): partner to ashwagandha, name means roughly “she who possesses 100 husbands”; promotes love and devotion; useful in infertility for all genders; for dry mucus membranes; cooling and moist; 5 g
- Maca (*Lepidium meyenii*): used as food crop in Andes; induces fertility/virility in sheep and some research supports this action in cis men; can work for some short term (most reports are re: men over a couple of days), but I like for everyone/anyone, long term, to nourish and build reserves, increase desire; 2ml (1:5) 3x/day or as powder (1-2 g)
- Tribulus (*Tribulus terrestris*, aka *puncture vine*): used in Ayurveda, but also native to American SW; I’ve seen this work well in combo with above herbs to specifically enhance libido in menopause; 1g/day as part of powder formula
- Oats (not quite an adaptogen, but pretty close): nourishes nerves, a bit warming, has reputation for soothing the harried and building the burnt out; tea 3-5 g; 2-5ml fresh tincture (1:2)
- **Licorice may be contraindicated if testosterone levels are an issue, as it has been shown to reduce T levels in cis women (used w/Peony for hyperandrogenism w/much success), however it’s so good to for the thin, exhausted person w/adrenal insufficiency, that it is worth a try if indicated
- consider Muira puama (*Ptychopetalum olacoides* aka *potency wood*): from Brazil; aphrodisiac and stimulant used for erectile dysfunction and poor libido; some adaptogens-like effects as well—haven’t used but research is mounting and traditional use is extensive; worth a try



Could also need stimulating nervines or adaptogens if motivation, energy or depression is part of picture:

Nervines: take your pick to make a tea, tincture or add to baths (except maybe st J—not so aromatic).

- Damiana (good aphrodisiac reputation), rosemary, lavender in smaller doses, peppermint, st johnswort

Try stimulating adaptogens before caffeine-like stimulants; work short term, but can certainly use long term in right constitution/situation; all address HPA axis dysfunction as above, but also are short term stamina and focus builders; start slow on dose—a little could go a long way:

- Asian and American ginsengs (*Panax ginseng* and *P. quinquefolius*): powerful adaptogens w/history of use in increasing male virility/fertility; aphrodisiac and energy enhancers, tonify jing (original essence, source of sexual potency/fluids); research supports T increase in cis men for *P. ginseng*, unknown if effect applies to all; reduces fatigue, increases resilience; known to “spare adrenals”, while reducing glucocorticoid release; warming (*P. ginseng* more so), moist; decoction 2-4g/day; tincture (1:5) 5-10ml/day
- Eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*): similar to above, a good one for fatigue and debility, along w/depression, esp related to stress; neutral qualities; 1.5-3g/day; tincture (1:5) 4-6ml TID
- Schisandra (*S. chinensis*): nice pick me up for motivation, focus, energy; history of use for sexual disinterest, fatigue, depression; as a berry it can make an interesting addition to a syrup w/other sweeter fruits; astringes/holds in jing; warming, astringing; 1-6g/day; tincture (1:5) 2-4ml TID
- Rhodiola (*R. rosea*): another one for stamina and endurance, along with improving mood, clarity and attention span; specific for libido issues; neutral temp, drying; start w/1 dropperfull of tincture and go up—can make some a little jittery

Immediate-moment stimulants can be helpful for some; alkaloidal CNS stimulants are best for short-term, limited use; have fun, but if you make a habit of it, consult an herbalist who can suss out any contraindications for you

- Caffeine: green tea, yerba maté (*Ilex paraguayensis*), chocolate; improve focus, enhance CNS activity; take care as caffeine actually reduces blood flow to periphery

- Yohimbe (*Pausinystalia yohimbe*): traditional West African aphrodisiac, used for erectile dysfunction (clitoris is erectile tissue!); CNS stimulant—care if already anxious or hypertensive (though is hypotensive in high doses); is a peripheral vasodilator; 1:5 tincture 5-10 drops 2x/day; absorbs quickly, best on empty stomach; might need to redose as it clears in a little over 30 minutes (care in low or high blood pressure or bipolar or schizophrenic disorders; not in kidney or liver diseases)

Might also need to enhance circulation:

Need plenty of blood in periphery (can be issue w/SSRI use): brain, genitals, finger tips; take your pick of these good circulatory stimulants for use in tea, tincture, cordials, food or baths:

- Ginkgo, rosemary, gotu kola, cinnamon, cayenne, mint
- ginger – can do ginger oil massage on abdomen; some use directly on genitals (eek); ginger honey...
- All aromatic food spices: cardamom, fennel, cumin, coriander, anise, nutmeg, cloves

All of the above could be creatively combined into an aphrodisiac meal. Just prepping the food will get you in the mood, especially if you lick your fingers a lot!

- Fresh juicy fruits (eat with fingers!)
- Stuffed figs or dates w/goat cheese or cream cheese, sweet or savory
- garlicky basil pesto or fresh garlic oil on warm bread; veggie or meat w/coconut made into curries; meats or cheeses w/spices
- chocolatey or other velvety dessert (Chocolate w/curry spices and coconut!) or perhaps just a sweet, stimulating cordial (chocolate damiana? kava rose?)

If no time for a full meal, consider:

- Just stuffed dates or figs, one simple fruit w/a little honey or chocolate
- Spiced honey or butter spread onto vehicle of choice
- Electuary or bliss balls with various relaxing, stimulating herbs, chocolate powder, coconut, ghee or nut butter...dates, rose or orange water...

Make a few bits to keep your energy up and senses awake for next to the bed (or wherever!), too.

So now we've taken herbs, maybe had a bath, we're thinking lots about pleasure and getting into our bodies; we might want to prepare our space with scents, like essential oils of various spices, roses, jasmine, vanilla, patchouli, vetiver, sandalwood; gather or buy flowers—scented flowering herbs are great, too...

We're ready...

During:

While we're actively engaged (we really already have been for a while), the focus is even more on sensorial stimulation and intensity, scent, texture, visual cues. So things that look like a vulva, breasts or penis or other favorite body parts (eyes, back, feet?), or that engage you in licking, sucking, biting, focusing on details of sensation in sensitive areas (like toes!)...getting you into your animal body, are all welcome.

Play with your food:

Here we need to take care w/any sugars from fruits, honey, chocolate, liquers getting into vagina and upsetting the resident ecosystem...hello infection. If we're using latex-based barrier methods, we also have to keep anything with oil or fat in it away from the latex or anything it will touch, as oils weaken latex and it will not provide the barrier you want. Otherwise, the rest of the body is fair game and your imagination is the limit. A few bits to get you started...

- Fruits, esp. juicy like peach, mango; sexy shapes: strawberries, bananas, figs
- Sauces/body paints: chocolate or other flavors (butterscotch?); Jam thinned w/honey, rosewater? Other fruit syrups as body paints
- Honey: long considered an aphrodisiac, esp by Egyptians; will moisten skin, too (full body wrap, anyone?) and washes off surprisingly easily; add ginger, a few drops of mint or orange essential oil or infuse w/spices or even garlic
- Vanilla, long associated w/sensuality and sexuality; make your own extract to add to foods or even use as body scent—goes quite well with body odor!

For cheap penetration toys: (both take a condom nicely)

- Ping tung or other Japanese eggplants: small and slender-ish; indestructible skin, quite flexible, come in lots of sizes and are good and curvy for getting in hard-to-reach places! Grow a dildo patch next year!
- suyo long (or European) cuke: smooth, flexible (though a little more likely to break); no prickles, thick skin

**care w/penetration of anus: don't lose things! Should always have a base of some sort to retain a portion of the object outside of the body!*

Herbs to make out with:

- Kava: can use topically as oil to numb mucus membranes (interesting); also relaxes smooth muscles to help make you more receptive if tension is an issue; makes nice oil w/a *little* infused ginger or cinnamon
- Cinnamon/peppermint/ginger in honey or oil on nipples or possibly other sensitive areas w/care
- Rose glycerite or anything in glycerine feels warming and is also re-wettable (care w/vaginal use)
- Cordials: Chocolate, Vanilla, Damiana, Rose, spices...be creative; these can be sipped, licked, dripped...

**Essential oil safety: if you add EOs to honey or massage oils and then things get too exciting (ie burning or hot), rub a fixed oil like olive oil on the area to slow absorption. Water won't help. Always dilute EOs for topical application and keep out of eyes.*

Recipes mentioned:

Chocolate cordial (from Diana De Luca, can't be improved upon!)

½ cup brandy
1 cup cocoa syrup
1 tsp vanilla extract

Bottle ingredients and shake well, let sit for 2-7 days. It will get smoother the longer you let it sit. Incredible drunk as is, poured over icecream or fruit, or my favorite, added to hot chocolate on winter nights while looking at the stars...or the stars in someone's eyes.



[to make cocoa syrup: 1/3 cup cocoa powder, 1 c sugar, 1 c boiling water, 1 tablespoon vanilla extract; mix cocoa and sugar together and add boiling water to dissolve sugar; when cool, add vanilla]

Kava rose syrup

Makes kava taste oh-so-much better!

This can be made by blending 1 part strong kava tincture with 4 parts rose syrup or glycerite
[rose syrup can be 1:1 rosewater and honey]

Aphrodisiac Bliss Balls (with thanks to Claudia Wingo for original BB recipe)

(or spoonable Electuary w/o the seeds, ghee or almond butter—make as thin as you want)

1 oz cocoa powder
1 oz ashwagandha
1 oz shatavari
1 oz schisandra
1 oz maca
0.5 oz cinnamon
0.25 oz cardamom
0.25 oz ginger
¼ cup ground pumpkin seeds
1 cup honey
1 cup ghee or almond butter

Optional to roll in sesame seeds, coconut

Can also add rose water or rose powder to mix; experiment with other powders as you like—could be more stimulating—this one is more tonic w/a schisandra-chocolate kick.

Blend powders then stir in other ingredients and roll into acorn sized balls and eat 4-6. Can use these as daily adaptogen tonic, 4-6/day or just a special snack.

Natural Lube:

What if you don't want to use the creepy toxic stuff, but need a little lube for good glide. Even if you're super juicy naturally, anal play always needs lube and let's face it, lube does sometimes spice things up!

Our own lubrication is made of mucins (sugar-like molecules) and water. In general it is important to reduce friction, which causes micro-damage to delicate tissues (making one more prone to various infections); protects vaginal lining from microbes; also serves

as food for sperm. We make less natural lube when taking antihistamines or if we smoke right before sex (decreases circulation to pelvis).

For more good info on lubrication and how different fake lubes work you can check out this fun and nerdy blog post:
<http://physicsofsex.blogspot.com/2006/12/slip-slide-or-stick-friction-and.html>

Most lubes out there are full of undesirables like parabens, synthetic fragrances, and propylene glycol. Most natural/organic lubes at least have some glycerine (which can promote bacterial/yeast growth). Look at ingredients! [One brand I like: “Yes” has oil-based and water-based options; Good Clean Love is all organic, but does have glycerine—haven’t had trouble w/it however.]

Lube options:

- Oils: these are great if you aren’t using any latex-based barrier methods (condoms, dental dams, gloves), as oils weaken these; fine w/saran wrap; they last a long time, don’t dry out; work well for underwater sex; because you have to wash them off w/soap, they’re not so good for the vagina, as soap strips protective mucus from tissue, leaving it vulnerable to infection; good for anal penetration and lubing penis
- Water-based lubes: these are good for use w/latex barrier methods but can dry out (most can be re-moistened); also fine w/saran wrap and best for toys
- Silicone-based: ok w/latex, not as good for vagina b/c you have to wash w/soap, but better than those w/glycerine for sugar issue; good for anal play where you need latex; damages silicone toys (dimethicone replaces glycerine in many water-based formulas, so keep an eye out for it)

While we’re at it, some barrier options other than latex:

- Polyurethane condoms are ok w/oil-based lubes, I hear they feel different, are looser and are expensive; good for latex allergy
- Polyisoprene condoms are more stretchy, can’t use w/oils, expensive, but help w/latex allergy
- Dental dams come in all materials as above
- Saran wrap is a great option b/c it covers as much area as you need! only disadvantage is that it can tear more easily than dental dam (get non-microwaveable kind); transmits heat; can cover w/honey! Excellent for oral sex, nice w/lube between receiver and wrap (oil or water-based are fine)

DIY lubes:

Oily: coconut oil, salves, massage oils, cocoa butter

Water-based: flax seed mucilage

There’s been question about whether flax mucilage is latex-friendly; at this point it seems so given its inclusion in the Yes! water-based lube formula, as well as support for its use w/latex from sex expert Sherri Winston.

Here’s a recipe from Rebecca Hartman at the Herbwife’s Kitchen blog:

Simmer 1 tablespoon of flax seeds in 1 cup of water until it’s reduced by half (maybe 20 minutes). Strain immediately. (If you let it cool, it’ll be too thick to strain.) Store it in the fridge when you don’t need it — it’ll only keep for a couple of days unrefrigerated. You could experiment with scents and flavors — just add herbs or spices to the simmering pot! (Start with small amounts, though — too much of a strong herb or spice could cause burning in sensitive areas. I’d avoid essential oils for the same reason. And though it might be tempting, I’d stay away from sugar, as it can lead to infections.)

Carrageenan seems to inhibit HPV infection, so consider adding some of this inexpensive gelling agent to your lube if you’re DIYing it.

After--healing after too much excitement:

Consider the use of washes, steams, suppositories and salves to heal inflamed or damaged tissue (vulva, anus, nipples, lips). Also, spray or soak with rose, chamomile or lavender flower waters.

“Morning after pill”:

suppository made with equal parts chamomile, calendula, gotu kola infused into cocoa butter can be soothing and healing, as well as gently antimicrobial—lovely with a little lavender essential oil added

And now for a little safety break...

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and “safer” sex:

The only 100% safe sex is sex with yourself or none at all. *Safer* sex involves use of various barrier methods (like condoms, dams and gloves) along with lubricant when friction is high, as well as good communication w/partners. Awareness of your own or partner's immune function is low (including from stress) is also important, as viruses like Herpes Simplex Viruses (HSV) and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) are more easily spread/contracted in this case. Even with these measures, however, there are no guarantees, since some viruses, like HSV and HPV are passed via skin-to-skin contact that involves parts not generally covered by condoms, for example the scrotum or perineal area. Add to that the fact that many folks (esp. cis men and anyone else with a penis) don't have symptoms even if they are infected with many common STIs and it can be impossible to feel certain about being or staying infection-free.

I suggest letting go of certainty and finding where you feel comfortable in terms of risk. There are risks to so many activities, but we don't live in fear or ignore the risks, we act accordingly and enjoy ourselves—driving a car requires us to use a seatbelt, drive w/in the speed limit, and follow road signs. Most of us choose to do that and are OK. We don't generally complain about it, even if we'd like to drive 100mph down the freeway. Some folks do that and are also ok. Sometimes accidents happen to both sorts of people, but the risk is obviously greater for the more reckless folks. We can decide for ourselves which path we take, but we also should be aware that we impact our community with our choices, just as the speeding driver does...

While we may not feel overly concerned about certain infections, as they can be treated or are manageable with few symptoms, many put us at risk for developing more serious infections or conditions (for example, the damage to vaginal epithelium caused by *Trichomonas* infection predisposes one to HIV infection and might activate latent HPV, possibly leading to cervical dysplasia; HSV infection is also a risk factor for developing cervical dysplasia).

Given all of that, we still don't have to let fear keep us from having sex, or let ourselves get so overwhelmed that we do nothing to address the very real health risks. To me, the idea is to accept the realities of sex today, get smart about them, and live a juicy life regardless. Many (almost MOST) people have been exposed to herpes and/or HPV and the likelihood of infection is high over our lifetime.

In order to empower ourselves in choosing how much risk we're willing to take for pleasure, we need to know what puts us at risk, regardless of the parts/partners involved.

Anatomy to know:

- Mucus membranes (mm): mouth, vagina, penis (urethral opening), anus, eyes; this is where we are permeable to our partner's saliva, semen, vaginal fluids, blood, sweat
- Fluids: Vaginal fluid/Semen/Sweat/saliva can spread HSV (eek eyes!) (these carry the fluid from lesion, but virus can also shed w/o lesion, mm are most vulnerable; blood, vaginal fluid, semen spread HIV)
- Scrotal skin/perineal/external vulva area: HPV & HSV loves to live here, in addition to genital mucus membranes; HSV also loves skin around mouth; microscopically abraded skin is more likely to transmit HSV/HPV and is more vulnerable to infection

What does "safer" look like for all sorts of bodies and combinations of bodies?

Basically you're looking to prevent mm-mm contact, contact between mm and abraded genital area skin, contact between body fluid and mm or abraded skin, and contact between blood and mm or abraded skin or cuts/sores (for HIV), no matter who's playing!

If we have an expanded definition of sex, we have more options in terms of activities and we can choose 'safer' activities to suit our comfort level with risk.

What you can do to be "safer":

- there are only a few 100% safe sexual activities (masturbation, cyber sex, other non-wet activities as notable exceptions, even virginal sex can include HSV-1 inf), so we're looking at a spectrum of risk (low to high, depending on our activities).
- have low-risk sex (kissing, mutual masturbation (one hand for each of you; with HIV, care with broken skin), fantasy play, massage, clean sex toys)—low-risk will mean different things to different people—communicate with all partners
- don't share toys or clean btw uses – HPV can hang out for a while
- use water-based lube (sorry no chocolate sauce!), tears in mm and skin increase risk of transmission (not nonoxynol-9--now thought to increase risk of HIV infection!!)
- use barrier methods (condoms, dental dams, gloves, saran wrap (non-microwavable), "female" condom--polyurethane), even between HSV outbreaks and always if you know you're carrying HPV, HIV; also on toys if shared or porous material
- get tested at least 1x/year if applicable
- boost your immune system when you have a new partner and/or one known to be infected, or if you are infected and exposing partners

- don't have higher-risk sex when you're sick, emotionally distraught, during trauma, etc or when others are...this makes you more vulnerable (for HSV this is proven, HPV likely); staying up late partying and eating poorly is a good way to be vulnerable!
- don't stress out! The best thing we can do is take care of ourselves and each other, knowing that we are making educated decisions. Being stressed/afraid lowers our immunity and increases our vulnerability.
- Being in denial or allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed is irresponsible—communicate honestly and get clear about what is comfortable and healthy for you and your partners given the variables of your situation.
- eat your greens! And color/vitamin/antioxidant-rich diet; use immune tonics/stimulants when w/new partner!
- **Have FUN! Pleasure is an immune boost!**

The good news is we can manage our health with herbs and diet if we are infected.

Herbal approaches:

These are just to get you started, as there are so many possibilities for herbs to match the numerous variables present in each person. I can't possibly cover it all here, so I'm giving a basic formula for each condition. For all conditions, treat the partner(s), even if asymptomatic, and use a combination of internal and external approaches (douches/rinses, steams, soaks, suppositories) for all parties. Internally, we're talking about strong immune stimulants in acute/symptomatic infections and immunomodulants/tonics in long-term and/or asymptomatic infections (sometimes can use combo, as below). Couple these with anti-inflammatories, alteratives and/or lymphatics and perhaps a few nervines to deal with the stress of the situation and you have a good formula. Eating lots of good lactofermented foods (or second-best, lactobacillus supplements) is indicated in most instances and avoiding sugar is always a good idea.

A sample successful immune stimulant formula for HPV infection:

4ml astragalus
 3ml st john's wort
 3 ml schisandra
 2.5ml elderberry
 2.5ml echinacea
 15ml /day = 1 tsp 3x/day before meals or on an empty stomach, if possible

I also love cleavers, calendula as lymphatics; baptisia, boneset, eleuthero as immune stimulants; licorice as an anti-inflammatory.

For the most part, herbal anti-bacterials taken orally are not going to be useful here, as they aren't getting to the vagina. The exception would be in urinary tract infection, which is very approachable with internal use of antibacterials, which are often cleared via the kidney and so reach the bladder and urethra. Anti-virals taken internally do seem to be useful, keeping HSV, HPV and hepatitis viral infections at bay over the long term. Topical use of anti-virals is also helpful.

For topical anti-microbial action, try approaches like steams, soaks/compresses, rinses, or suppositories, depending on what works best for the situation. Add to those anti-microbials specific to the condition (virus, bacteria, protozoa) something vulnerary, anti-inflammatory and anodyne for pain or itch, and you're good to go.

There are more STIs than what you find here, but these are the most common in my practice:

Bacterial vaginosis, aka BV (caused by a variety/combo of bacteria, a non-specific diagnosis):

- Classic presentation: watery, foamy, white/gray, fishy smelling (esp after sex) discharge; pH is elevated, lactobacilli are fewer than normal so not protecting mucus membranes from colonization by other microbes
- quick fixes: avoid systemic antibiotics as possible; use condom as relevant (semen elevates pH), insert lactobacillus acidophilus caps or yogurt into vagina (especially as relief from anti-microbial formulas), vinegar rinse/douche can help (though douching in general can reduce lactobacilli population, so don't overdo it); cotton undies and lots of fresh air to keep dry
- possible topical (inserted into vagina) formula:
 - capsules containing boric acid (calendula salve for slight burn after insertion) and/or suppository or wash w/some combo of goldenseal/barberry, echinacea, usnea, sage, thyme, calendula

Trichomoniasis aka "trick" (caused by *Trichomonas vaginalis*, a protozoa)

- Classic presentation: green, yellow, gray, bad smelling (tennis shoes) discharge; itchy, maybe pain w/sex or urination
- pH is elevated
- especially important to treat partner

- quick fixes: same as for BV
- Topical formula: boric acid caps/suppositories; consider also usnea, goldenseal/barberry, sage, with a vulnerary like calendula, as wash/douche (tea or dilute tincture); some like garlic clove (undamaged) inserted into vagina for 12 hrs/day

Urinary tract infection (often caused by *E. coli*) classic from too much excitement and/or new partners:

- Classic presentation: burning with urination or just after; urge to pee frequently but little urine present
- Quick fix: drink lots of water, esp w/unsweetened cranberry juice; lay off the excitement
- Internal formula: tea using yarrow, goldenrod, and corn silk/couchgrass (all equal parts) with ¼ part juniper (you can do this for 2 weeks or so and then take juniper out—it can over stimulate kidneys; often simple UTI will be clear by then anyway)

Yeast infection (caused by *Candida albicans* overgrowth)

- Classic presentation: cottage cheesy, baked bread/sweet smelling discharge, itchy, burning vulva
- Quick fixes: same as for BV, avoid sugar especially here; however, as pH is usually about normal, acidifying vaginal can be less helpful
- Topical formula: boric acid caps/suppositories can sometimes help, though see above; again consider some combo of goldenseal/barberry, juniper, sage, usnea, wormwood, thyme, with a vulnerary like calendula, as washes, esp for perineal area (avoiding GI yeast or other microbes from traveling to vagina); some like garlic clove (undamaged) inserted into vagina for 12 hrs/day or garlic douche

HSV (Herpes simplex virus):

- Classic presentation: pustular, red, painful/itchy lesions, progress to crust; often recur in same location
- HSV-1 and HSV-2, prefer to infect mouth and genitals respectively, but do move back and forth; 1 in 5 infected (most individuals have antibodies/have been exposed—80% to HSV-1); increases risk for HIV infection, possible cofactor in cervical cancer; neonatal infection can cause neurological impairment & death; can shed between (1-2 day periods) outbreaks, recurrent infections generally only involve shedding for 4 days prior to/beginning of outbreak; inactive at room temp and when dry
- Quick fixes if infected: stay out of sun and extreme heat to prevent outbreak; consider arginine/lysine ratio in diet (studies have demonstrated an enhancing effect on viral replication when the amino acid ratio of arginine to lysine favors arginine); reduce intake of arginine-rich foods (walnuts, peanuts, sesame seeds, almonds, grapes, seafood, coconut, chocolate and many more); include more lysine-rich foods (many cheeses and yogurt) or use a topical or internal lysine supplement
- Possible topical formula used as tinctures mixed in green clay or marshmallow root powder and applied until lesion dries out and starts to heal
 - licorice
 - st johnswort
 - lemon balm
 - self heal (or sage, thyme, rosemary, peppermint)
- follow with st johnswort oil/salve and other vulneraries, such as calendula or self heal
- St Johnswort internally is also effective here, though licorice internally is not proven to act as an antiviral (unless injected!); the verdict on internal antiviral activity of lemon balm is also out
- You could start taking st johnswort and using a topical oil at first tingly signs of outbreak, can add a drop of lemon balm or rose geranium essential oil, too

HPV (Human papillomavirus)

- Classic presentation: none for high-risk strains, asymptomatic; is detected via pap test and then strain can be identified via DNA test; genital warts (not associated w/cervical dysplasia) are sometimes visible, often not
- some strains cause visible genital warts, others cause cervical dysplasia—strains 16, 18, 31 and 45 are “high risk”; at least 50% of folks are infected (3 of 4 adults by age 40 also estimated), high-risk strains linked to cervical dysplasia and cancer of cervix and anus; cofactors for cancer development are smoking, immunosuppression, folate deficiency, UV radiation, pregnancy
- Quick fix: Vitamin C deficiency is huge risk factor, as is folate deficiency; eat vegetables, especially fruit, orange and green foods!; avoid smoking, even cannabis (these increase risk for developing cervical dysplasia secondary to HPV infection)
- Possible topical formula for high-risk HPV infection of cervix, in form of vag pack (herbal compress using diaphragm to secure against cervix; dried herbs are reconstituted w/boiled water, chopped in blender w/powders and tincture; use every other night for 1 month; may need to rinse gently to remove herbs from vagina)
 - green tea (known HPV anti-viral, though only being used by pharma for visible warts)
 - meadowsweet
 - calendula

- echinacea
- licorice
- goldenseal (powder)
- marshmallow (powder)
- thuja tincture (30 drops)
- can add fresh chickweed, plantain, viola leaves as desired
- Drink green tea, as well.
- Many herbalists also use internal anti-virals that are good for HSV for HPV; they are different types of viruses, but along w/immune stimulants, those herbs are worth a try.

Others to think about:

Chlamydia (bacterial), gonorrhea (bacterial), Scabies (parasite), Hep ABC viruses, HIV

Safer Sex Kit on a Shoe String (from www.Scarleteen.com or Planned Parenthood--I believe, though I can no longer find it on either of their sites—not naturally oriented, but substitute as you like)

- One box of latex condoms, preferably NOT spermicidal, and in a variety of the styles you like. Keep a couple flavored ones (Trustex makes interesting flavors if you like) in there for fellatio (oral sex on a man). If you are allergic to latex, then polyurethane condoms will provide you the same level of protection. Just never use animal-based condoms for safer sex purposes as they do not block microorganisms.
Average cost: \$10
- One bottle of latex-safe, water-based lubricant. You can even get lubricant in single-use tubes and have a variety of lubes, including flavors.
Average cost: \$12
- 10 pairs of latex gloves -- any drug store or medical supply sells them. If you're allergic to latex, there are latex alternatives.
Average cost: \$5
- 5 dental dams, or, if you can't find them, a box of plain old plastic wrap (the kind you'd have in the kitchen for wrapping food) for cunnilingus (oral sex involving a vulva). If you're allergic to latex, go with the plastic wrap. (Don't get the microwaveable kind, it's more porous to microorganisms.)
Average cost for five dams: \$7
Average cost for one box of plastic wrap: \$2
- A little tube of organic aloe vera gel. Say what? Sometimes, our skin reacts badly to certain lubricants or condoms. When it does, a little aloe will soothe your skin and stop swelling and allergic reactions that can make the transmission of disease more likely. Let it sit for a little bit, then wipe with water, and you're all better.
Average cost: \$3

TOTAL COST: \$35

When to Use What Form of Protection

From www.Scarleteen.com—this is a great site, useful for teens and everybody else; pretty inclusive and up to date

Ideally, here's what you should be using to protect yourself as best you can from sexually transmitted infections when you're sexually active. Again, everyone will make their own choices in terms of how much protection they want to have -- some people are comfortable with just using condoms for vaginal or anal intercourse, others will want to add gloves or dams for other activities. You know best how protected YOU want to be, so make your personal choices accordingly.

Penis-in-vagina intercourse: Condom and lubricant

Anal Intercourse: Condom and lubricant (ALWAYS use a new condom if switching between vaginal and anal intercourse)

Fellatio: unlubricated condom

Cunnilingus: Dental dam or saran wrap barrier, lubricant (under barrier)

Analingus: Dental dam or saran wrap barrier, lubricant (under barrier)

Manual sex: Latex gloves (or just freshly-washed hands, if no hang nails or damaged skin), lubricant (over barrier)

What you're at risk for according to activity:

Vaginal or anal intercourse, or vaginal intercourse with a condom that has also been used for anal intercourse:

Bacterial Vaginosis

Chlamydia

Cytomegalovirus (CMV)

Gonorrhea

Hepatitis B

Herpes Simplex
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV, Warts)
Pubic Lice
Scabies
Syphilis
Trichomoniasis

(Vaginal intercourse and potentially anal intercourse also present risks of pregnancy, where relevant)

Oral sex:

Chlamydia
Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
Gonorrhea
Hepatitis B
Herpes Simplex
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
Syphilis
HPV **newer research suggests oral cancers, esp in cis men, are assoc w/HPV-16 (other head and neck cancers are believed to be associated as well)

Manual sex:

Bacterial Vaginosis
Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
Herpes Simplex
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV, Warts)
Pubic Lice
Scabies

Resources:

Botanica Erotica, Diana De Luca; for everything sensual and delightful, more recipes and fun
American Social Health Association: Great info on sexual health, high quality info on various STIs, differentiating lubricants and barrier methods; only con is they support the HPV vaccines: <http://www.ashastd.org/>
Downthere Health Collective, publishers of good zine on HPV, available at: <http://www.notjustskin.org/node/78>
www.physicsalsex.blogspot.com
www.scarleteen.com