

TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE

A Wimmin's Guide to Alternative Health Care

By Alicia non Grata



Zabalaza Books

"Knowledge is the Key to be Free"

Post: Postnet Suite 116, Private Bag X42,
Braamfontein, 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa

E-Mail: zababooks@zabalaza.net

Website: www.zabalaza.net/zababooks

you rent needles from a gallery, or buy them unbagged or rebagged, you must clean them thoroughly.

Clean your works, or any needles being used for tattooing or piercing by:

- 1) Pour rubbing alcohol (ethanol) into a clean glass (available at a drug store)
- 2) Pull alcohol up into syringe through needle, shake well, squirt out alcohol.
- 3) Repeat several times.
- 4) Take works apart.
- 5) Let entire set of works soak in alcohol for 10 to 15 minutes.
- 6) Pour alcohol out.
- 7) Let works dry.

Another method to clean needles etc. is household bleach -

- 1) Pour 1 ounce of bleach and 9 ounces of running tap water into glass or cup. Repeat steps from before, using this bleach solution rather than the alcohol. Rinse works well, using running Water from a faucet.

In Conclusion...

Well that about wraps it up. Keep in mind that safe sex does not necessarily mean monogamy - as long as the sex is always safe, it doesn't matter how many partners you have. The Health Department/Government agencies may want you to believe that AIDS is some divine retribution for "unnatural" behaviour and say that heterosexual monogamous relationships are the only true ways to completely avoid the AIDS virus. Any return to a false sense of morality can only lead to misinformation and shame and guilt, the death rate will sky rocket (as does the teenage pregnancy rate - another example of false morality being imposed). Keep this in mind when you read about AIDS in the newspapers and who are the sources you are getting your information from. I have found that the Gay and Lesbian community have the most up to date and accurate information about AIDS and the HIV virus. It is only through safe sex and needle use education that we can slow down and stop the rate of transmission. As well, a bit of direct action towards those who would keep us ill is desperately needed! Act Up! Fight Back! Fight AIDS!

SOURCES AND RESOURCES:

1. Gay Men's health Crisis pamphlet *Medical Answers About AIDS* (New York GMHC INC. 1989), pg. 3.
2. ACT/UP/New York - Woman and AIDS Book Group, *Women, AIDS and Activism* (Boston, South End Press, 1990), pg. 1.
3. "Medical Answers About AIDS." Pg. 7.
4. "Women, AIDS and Activism" pg. 19.
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 22.

Basically all the info. for this article was taken from the book *Women, AIDS, and Activism* by the ACT UP/N.Y. Womens and AIDS Book Group and a pamphlet by Gay Men's Health Crisis called *Medical Answers About AIDS* (In some cases in this article I have copied word for word, I footnoted because I wanted to make sure I got my information absolutely correct).

TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE

A Wimmin's Guide to Alternative Health Care

By Alicia non Grata

This pamphlet is reprinted from a series of five articles that first appeared in *Profane Existence* Magazine during 1990-91. The original unedited text has been left intact to keep the integrity and style of the original presentation. Each of the five sections is individually footnoted as they appeared in the original text.

The methods discussed in these articles as self-help for the treatment of various ailments are in no way intended to substitute a physician's advice. Methods discussed herein are for herstorical purposes only and should in no way substitute for the advice of an all-knowing physician.

This pamphlet was first produced and distributed by the Profane Existence Collective.

Zabalaza Books edition
November 2004.

The contact addresses that appeared at the end of the PE Collective's edition of this pamphlet have been removed for reasons of space and for the fact that they are over 10 years old. ZB requests that, if you distribute this pamphlet, please include an up-to-date contact list of AIDS awareness organisations in your region if possible.

Strength/Respect

CONTENTS:

PART ONE

**Witches, Midwives & Wise-
Wimmin** PAGE 4

PART TWO

**Healing Common Infections of the
Vagina and Bladder** PAGE 9

PART THREE

**Menstruation - Power or
Weakness?** PAGE 14

PART FOUR

**Birth Control (Is it Controlling
You?)** PAGE 21

PART FIVE

**Everybody's Guide to
Understanding AIDS** PAGE 27

Profance Existence

PO Box 8722,
Minneapolis, MN 55408,
USA

www.profaneexistence.com

tals before performing oral sex.

For the person doing the licking, sucking, the susceptibility to HIV is how healthy he/she is from the lips to stomach. Some routes for HIV to be transmitted include cold sores, bleeding gums, sore throats, and ulcers. Avoid brushing or flossing your teeth (which can cause bleeding) and smoking (which opens up blood vessels in your throat) before or after sex.

For vaginal/anal intercourse, whether you have sex with men or women, the guidelines are the same - use a latex rubber and a water based lubricant, preferably one that contains a spermicide. Unwrap the condom carefully so that it doesn't tear, put a drop of lube inside of the tip of the rubber (which makes it feel better) unroll it all the way down (don't put lube on the inside of the rubber, the shaft, this will help keep it from falling off). If your condom doesn't have a reservoir at the end for the cum, leave a half inch at the top while you unroll it. Put some lube on the outside of the rubber as well as on the vagina or asshole (your asshole needs extra lube because it does not lubricate itself during sex - extra lube can keep the rubber from breaking). Never reuse a condom.

If you're giving a man a blowjob, he should wear a condom from start to finish. Unlubed condoms taste better than lubed; it may help the taste to wipe off the powder that lightly covers the condom. You can also make your own "topping" by using syrups, jellies, etc. - just make sure you don't use anything with oils, alcohol, or animal fats in them as they will deteriorate the rubber. If you're healthy from your lips to your stomach (i.e. no cold sores, ulcers, etc.) risk of exposure to HIV may be reduced if you don't let your partner come in your

mouth or swallow his cum.⁶

Cunnilingus (eating out a womyn) and rimming are best when a barrier is used to cover the vagina/asshole. Dental dams can be used; they are commonly advocated by health care workers. To use a dental dam, cover the side that goes against the vagina with lube and hold in place with your hands (or your partners). Dental dams are really thick and some women have complained that they don't allow for much feeling. You can also cut the tip off of a rubber (condom) and slit it lengthwise or cut out the palm of a surgical glove. Another alternative (though untested) is ordinary plastic wrap such as Saran, Handi-wrap, Gladwrap, etc. Make sure you use a brand that is heavy enough - to test for porousness, you can wrap a cut onion in the plastic - if you can smell the onion it's not thick enough to prevent the HIV from passing through.

Use latex gloves for anal and vaginal finger and fist fucking if you have cuts or openings on your hands, or you bite or dip your nails too short. Also, never go back and forth from anal to vaginal sex without changing the condom. If you use any sex toys, dildos, etc., you should put a condom on it as it is passed from person to person -or you can use your own, exclusively. Some dildos can be boiled to sterilise them.

Safer Needle Use

Basically what it all boils down to is DON'T SHARE NEEDLES - whether for shooting drugs, piercing, or tattooing. If you shoot up, get your own needles and works - don't use anyone else's - don't share any part of your works (needles, syringes, and cookers) - don't share or reuse cottons. If you have to share, or if

inseminations?

★ Have you had unsafe sex involving oral contact with blood or vaginal fluids of a woman who has shared unsterilized needles or who has had unsafe sex with a man?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then you may be at risk for HIV infection.

What Is Safe Sex?

Safe sex is taking responsibility for your sexual behaviour to protect yourself and your partners against the transmission of HIV. Safer sex is more than a list of can/cannot practices; it is a way of exploring sexuality in ways that do not put you or your partners at risk. As well, safer sex can not only protect you from the HIV virus but also, for women, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases such as Syphilis, Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, Chancroid, Herpes, and Hepatitis B. As well, safer sex protects people who are HIV+ from reinfection with the virus, which could accelerate suppression of the immune system, and from other infections.⁴

Safer sex basically involves any practice that does not allow blood, semen, or vaginal secretions to be exchanged from person to person. Currently the best protection against HIV infection transmission are barrier methods - when sex includes the possibility of blood, semen, or vaginal fluids to enter the bloodstream through the mouth, vagina, or anus. Barrier methods include condoms, dental dams (square sheets of latex recommended for oral sex and rimming, available through your dentist, medical supply houses, or gay organisations), heavy gage household

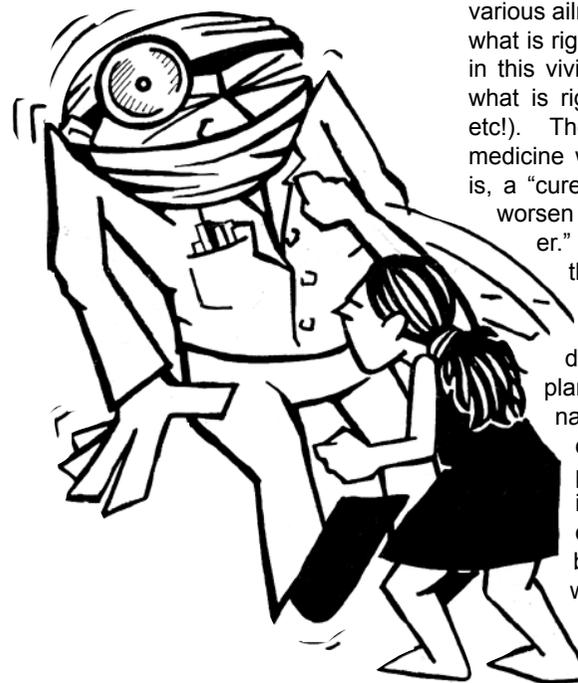
wrap (Saran, Glad Wrap, etc), latex surgical gloves, and fingercoats, which fit over one finger instead of the whole hand.

With any type of latex barrier be sure to use a safe lubricant such as K-Y. Don't use Vaseline, baby oil, vegetable oil, or moisturizing lotion (which contains chemicals that dissolve latex). Lubricants such as Stroglide and Foreplay (available at sex shops, etc.) are water based and contain nonoxynol 9 or octoxynol 9 - spermicides which also inhibit the transmission of HIV.

Blood and semen contain the highest concentration of HIV. Vaginal secretions have a lower concentration of HIV, but high enough to create a risk of transmission. Although HIV is found in trace amounts in saliva, there is no evidence that HIV can be transmitted this way, because saliva does not have enough HIV to transmit the virus. The possibility to transmit the virus from an infected person to someone he or she is eating out is extremely low; however bleeding or infections in the mouth and cuts and genital sores such as herpes could make the risk viable. The risk posed by vaginal secretions alone is relatively low but it can be raised easily by several factors including heavy vaginal secretions, vaginal infections such as Chlamydia or yeast (the infected secretions contain white blood cells which contain HIV and therefore increase the concentration of HIV in vaginal fluids).⁵

It is extremely important now to know what a healthy vagina and labia look like. Regular self-checks with a plastic speculum, mirror, and flashlight can show you if there are any cuts, abrasions, or unusual secretions that could put you more at risk of contracting HIV. As well take a good look at your partners' geni-

INTRODUCTION:



Healing ourselves; every womyn's right. Yet throughout our lives we have relied solely on interpretations of 'experts' who prescribe remedies for our various ailments and problems based on what is right for an 'average' womyn (or, in this vivisection-based medical world, what is right for the average rat, dog, etc!). These 'experts' often prescribe medicine with an iatrogenic effect, that is, a "cure or remedy which may often worsen the problem or cause another." What we often fail to realize is that we know our bodies best; and in a lot of cases often all that is needed is a change in diet, lifestyle, or to use our plant allies or medicines found in nature as a far less harmful and debilitating way of treating our problems. To look at our bodies *holistically*, not as a series of isolated malfunctions and breakdowns. This is not to say we should ignore a doctor's advice or discount all advances in modern science. However, the focus of this series of articles will

be on healing ourselves, listening to what our bodies are trying to tell us and *choosing* our own course of action. First, I will examine his/herstory to see why self-help and the help of womyn midwives, herbalists and healers were effectively discouraged. In later articles I will discuss various wimmin's complaints, infections, venereal diseases, menstrual problems, birth control, abortions, pregnancy and the nutritional needs of wimmin, all from a herbal and natural perspective. But now, to give a sense as to why many wimmin feel powerless in the face of gynaecologists and modern science I must present...

PART ONE:

WITCHES, MIDWIVES & WISE-WIMMIN

The History, Suppression and Persecution of Wimmin Healers

Once, medicine belonged to the people, not to some higher class with superior knowledge. Most healers were wimmin, as opposed to today, where roughly 90% of physicians are men. In pagan Rome there were several kinds of midwives (one for birthing, one for general health, etc.), all of whom were connected to the female temple. In Mexico the peasant womyn healer was called the Recibidora; obstetrician, the god mother, priestess and witch. In the first half of the Christian era, arts of medicine remained almost exclusively in the hands of wise-wimmin because ancient healing shrines were devoted almost exclusively to the goddess priestesses.¹ In general, wimmin practiced herbal medicine and were midwives, wise-wimmin, healers, therapists and general medicine practitioners. In early medieval England, there were wimmin clan leaders who had matriarchal rights in law giving and law enforcement; the Magna Charta of Chester called the "iudices de witch;" judges who were witches. Wimmin elders once had political power among the clans but patriarchal religion (such as Christianity) and law gradually took it away from them.² Most people have heard of witch hunts, the Inquisition and other terrible crimes committed in the name of 'God' yet do not realize that the witch hunts of the 14th and 17th century were not 'mobs gone mad,' ergot poisoning or extreme behaviours brought on by superstition and fear, but well-executed plans of extermination aimed at wiping out wimmin's power and crushing peasant uprisings. In *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, authors Barbera Ehrenreich and Deider English write, "The Witch hunts were well organized campaigns initiated, financed and



believe that chronic, untreatable Candida Albicans (yeast) infections and Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) are two opportunistic infections that afflict HIV+ women and are signs of a failing immune system.

How is HIV Transmitted?

HIV is transmitted by any practice that puts your bloodstream in contact with an HIV infected person's blood or semen. Saliva and tears are considered unlikely sources of transmission and have not been linked to transmission of HIV - contact with faeces (shit) of an infected person may pose a greater risk of transmission due to the possible presence of blood in the faeces. HIV has also been identified in the breast milk, as well as cervical and vaginal secretions, and menstrual blood. As well, it may be that HIV may directly infect the cells of the inner lining of the vagina and cervix in male/female sex, in anal sex (no matter what the sex of the one receiving is) transmission to the "insertive" partner is believed to take place through exposure of the male urethra mucus membranes with contaminated body fluids. Several cases of AIDS have been attributed to the ingestion of cervical/vaginal secretions as well as breast milk.³

What are the Highest Risks for Transmissions?

1. Contaminated blood or blood products for transfusion or injection.
2. Contaminated needles, syringes, bulbs, works, or cookers.
3. Unprotected anal intercourse with an infected person; primarily for the "receptive" partners whether male or female (the partner whose ass is getting

fucked). HIV may be transmitted by the ripping of the rectal tissue and subsequent bleeding, which provides access for the infected sperm to the bloodstream; recent evidence also suggests that the HIV may directly infect the inner lining or wall of the colon, which includes the anus and rectum.

4. Unprotected vaginal intercourse with an infected partner.
5. Ingestion of infected partners seminal fluid (pre-cum), ejaculate (cum), cervical or vaginal secretions, breast milk, blood or any body fluids or secretions that are contaminated with blood.

Who is at Risk For Contracting HIV?

It is not your sexual preference or race or sex which puts you at risk of HIV infection - it is your behaviours. To assess your own risk for contracting HIV, answer the following yes or no questions for the year 1977 to the present: (taken from Women, Activism, and AIDS).

- ★ Have you used drugs or alcohol to the point of impaired judgment and memory loss (i.e. got really, really fucked up) and went home with someone and didn't remember what you did?
- ★ Have you had unsafe sex (see "What is Safe Sex") by consent or by force?
- ★ Did you receive a blood transfusion or blood products before 1985? (In mid 1985 a test was developed to screen blood for HIV.)
- ★ Have you shared unsterilized hypodermic needles or other drug works, or shared unsterilized needles, safety pins, etc. for tattooing or piercing?
- ★ Have you had a needlestick injury involving an HIV+ blood sample?
- ★ Have you had unscreened artificial

ences).

Think because you're heterosexual, or female, or only shoot up drugs occasionally that you aren't at risk? Think again. All groups of people no matter what your race, sex, or sexual persuasion are affected by AIDS. Later on in this article there's a little questionnaire as to what behaviours are thought to be transmitters of the HIV virus. But now, here's the technical stuff; I tried to use terms easily understood most of the time, but sometimes the medical jargon cannot be avoided.

What is AIDS?

The acronym AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is an infectious, transmittable retrovirus - a disease in which your body's immune system is weakened (compromised) and eventually destroyed. Therefore, people who have the AIDS virus are vulnerable to certain infections/cancers that a healthy person's immune system would fight off. The two most frequently reported of these infections are Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia (PCP), which is a fungal infection of the lungs, and Kaposi Sarcoma (KS), a rare, atypical form of cancer. KS, which affects primarily homosexual or bisexual men, has shown a decline in the percentage of cases, probably due to safer sex education in the gay community. The percent of cases of PCP has remained high.

Women and the AIDS diagnoses is a completely different story - because the focus of AIDS research is on men and the opportunistic infections they get, women are under diagnosed by the Centre for Disease Control, since they do not fit the disease pattern. There may

be different opportunistic infections that affect women infected with the HIV virus (more on this later).

What Causes AIDS?

Most 'traditional' medical/scientific observers believe that AIDS is caused by a retrovirus known as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV seems to have an incubation period of 5 to 10 years or more (incubation period is the length of time from initial infection to the development of symptoms). HIV damages primarily cells in the immune system in humans, invading and reproducing in T-Lymphocytes and macrophages (two types of white blood cells), as well as brain cells. What happens is eventually these lymphocytes are destroyed, leaving the infected person immune-deficient and vulnerable to attack by viruses, fungi, protozoa, bacteria, and other aparently opportunistic diseases such as cancers.¹

HIV infection is believed to be life-long - even if the infected person is not showing any symptoms of the disease, it still can be transmitted. The number of AIDS cases is monitored; the number of people who are HIV+ is only estimated. The diagnosis of AIDS is given to an HIV+ person when a predetermined set of opportunistic infections or cancers are discovered and can be medically documented or when either a waisting syndrome (large weight loss) or HIV dementia (changes in mental alertness) are identified.² The problem here for women who are HIV+ is that many are dying of opportunistic infections without ever receiving the diagnosis of AIDS. Without this diagnosis, they are excluded from the statistics - and getting counted and treated while they are still alive! Some

executed by the church and state..." The most virulent witch-hunts were associated with periods of great social upheaval, shaking feudalism at its roots - mass peasant uprisings and conspiracies, the beginnings of capitalism (ugh!), etc. There is fragmentary evidence - which feminists ought to follow up on - suggesting that in some areas witchcraft represented a female-led peasant rebellion... During the witch hunt craze, wimmin made up some 85% of those executed - old wimmin, young wimmin and children.³

Why? Besides the incredibly and undeniably misogynist nature of the Catholic Church and Christianity in general, the reasons were political: Wipe out the people's healers and you effectively wipe out the people. Through the rise of patriarchal powers and the establishment and defining of a class system, those in the ruling class realized that by crushing wimmin's right to study midwifery (and later on in medical history to make it impossible for wimmin to study medicine) they could control the population and quell sparks of autonomy. With an emerging ruling class and Christianity on the rise, such autonomy was contrary to what these forces thrived upon; subservience and blind obedience. There is evidence that wimmin did meet in small groups, not to conduct services to Satan as the Church accused, but to discuss herbal lore, news, and perhaps served as discussions of political activity, peasant uprisings, etc. These small groups then met with other groups on Pagan Festival days, where the people present numbered in the hundreds of thousands.⁴ Yet the church and state effectively ripped out any seedlings of revolt by instilling fear and preying on superstitious, uneducated people to effectively

conduct the witch hunts and later the Inquisition.

You see, herbal medicine and lore is mainly based on generations of empiricism discussions based on trial and error, cause and effect. The Church of course was heavily anti-empiricist, relying mainly on faith and the complete distrust of the senses. Besides, it was the church's belief that pain and sickness were just rewards for sinning, especially for pain in childbirth, which is wimmin's punishment for Eve's original sin. If you were rich, of course, the Church allowed you to be "treated" by a priest-doctor. Witches and herbal healers were the only hope for millions of poor people; also for several centuries wimmin midwives were the only people to have knowledge of the birth process, female anatomy, and how to facilitate labour.⁵ Some important medical remedies discovered by peasant witches were the use of Ergot for pain in labour (derivatives are still used in modern medicine today), the use of which was punishable by death; Belladonna, an anti-spasmodic; and digitalis for heart ailments.

So, as we see, with the rise of Christianity (as well as with Protestantism) wimmin were hated not only because of their link to paganism and goddess worship, but also because they posed a real threat to church and state on account of the knowledge they possessed about healing. The forces that held (and still hold) these patriarchal institutions did everything they could to kill these early healers. They accused wimmin healers of practicing black magic; i.e. putting curses on people, animals, crops, etc. which was punishable by death. Yet wimmin were also persecuted, tried and executed if they practiced white magic or the healing arts -

practicing herbalism or midwifery, or making people well. A witchcraft act of 1542 specifically lists the 'good' witch as being among those whose activities were "prohibited by law because she was an unlicensed practitioner of medicine and other practical skills."⁶ Interestingly enough, although it was a crime to practice witchcraft, it was not a crime to practice sorcery, which was often practiced by the church. Most witches were wimmin, most sorcerers were men.

I feel I cannot stress enough the role of religion - Christianity and Catholicism mainly here, although Protestantism and most other Western religions as well - had to play in the suppression, torture and murder of millions of wimmin during the Middle Ages (and continuing right up to modern time!). The very idea of a feminist Christian is ludicrous; the Bible states in many places that wimmin are never equal to men and are something

**FUCK OFF
PATRIARCHY**



to be feared, are unclean, and are the roots of temptation and evil. Some interesting quotes:

"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you," Genesis 3:16.

"Adam was not deceived, but woman was deceived and betrayed and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty," I Timothy 2,14-18.

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," Exodus 22:18.

"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft," I Samuel 12:23 AV.

Fears of contamination by wimmin's "demonic powers" and "uncleanliness" led the Church to declare edicts stating that wimmin must be kept away from sacred objects while menstruating and receive communion through a veil. Wimmin could not enter a church for 33 days after the birth of a son and 66 days after the birth of a daughter. While in labour, a womyn was unclean spiritually and wouldn't go to heaven if she died in childbirth unless a priest was present to absolve her.

The Catholic Church applied the word "witch" to any womyn who criticized Church policies. As well, writers of the Talmud decreed nearly all wimmin as witches.⁷ Witches became the symbol for the Church's fear of and hatred of wimmin, as Elizabeth Cady Staton pointed out in her book *Original Feminist Attack on the Bible*: "The spirit of the Church in its contempt for women, as shown in the scriptures in Paul's Epistles and the Pentateuch, the hatred of the fathers, manifested in the ecclesiastical canons, and in the doctrines of ascetism,

PART FIVE:

EVERYONE'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AIDS

With this part I am straying a bit from the topic of "Alternative Wimmin's Health Care" in order to provide some information about the "AIDS Virus", how it is acquired and spread as well as practices which avoid it. Although it seems this topic should be well covered and understood, I am constantly amazed at the misunderstandings, panic, and homophobia that I have encountered in the punk/hardcore /metal/"Alternative" (whatever) scene.

So what I'm basically going to do here is to pass on some info. from Gay Men's Health Crisis and ACT UP / N.Y. on what exactly AIDS is - how it's transmitted, how it can be avoided, who is at risk, and what is "safe sex" and "safer" needle use. I hope primarily to show that AIDS is not a "gay, white male disease" - which is what the media have played it up to be. Consider these statistics:

★ AIDS is now the LEADING CAUSE of death for women, ages 19-34 in New York City. It is rapidly becoming the leading cause of death for infants under one year of age.

★ Nationally, women now comprise 13% of reported AIDS cases. Women with AIDS are now the fastest growing demographic group of PWA'S (People With AIDS), as well there is reason to believe that the number of women with AIDS is GREATLY underreported (more on that later).

★ Nationally, although African American and Latino woman comprise 25% of the population, they represent almost 75% of women with AIDS.

These statistics were taken from endnotes of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of *Women, AIDS & Activism* (see refer-

A Women's Herbal by Jeannine Parvati lists some for herstorical purposes, so if you're curious about herbs which cause conditions of temporary or permanent sterility you can look there.

To me, the term "herbal birth control" refers more to the using of herbs to help regulate and understand your menstruation - then you become more familiar with your body and can use ovulation signs and fertility awareness with a greater degree of effectiveness. Also, do not confuse herbal abortifacants (herbs that cause abortions) with others that help bring on a delayed mensus. I will talk about herbal abortifacants more in a later article.

This article was intended to give you a chance for some control in your deci-

sion on whether or not to become pregnant. Remember, no matter what method you choose, it's your body and your decision. Ask your doctor as much as you can about any method you may be considering, and don't let him/her push you into taking the pill (a lot of doctors will assume you are too "irresponsible" or "lazy" for any method except the pill). Becoming more familiar with your body does not entail any special responsibility - it is as simple as taking your life back from those who have turned wimmin's health into another marketable commodity, another product, another problem that needs to be solved with drugs and specialized care. You know your body best listen to it, and yourself, over any "experts" advice.

SOURCES:

1. Seaman, Barbara. *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill* (Doubleday, 1980), p. 145.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

The section on ovulation signs and fertility awareness was taken from *The Natural Birth Control Book* by A. Rosenblum (available for \$6.00 from Aquarian Research Foundation / 5620 Morton St / Philadelphia, PA 19144 / (215) 849-3237)

An excellent sourcebook and self-help guide for wimmin is *How to Stay Out of the Gynaecologists Office* by the Federation of Feminist Health Centres. The book is available for \$9.95 plus shipping and handling (write to the National Office / 309 Santa Monica Boulevard Ste. 306 / Santa Monica, CA 90401)

Fertility awareness method info:

- ★ Emma Goldman Clinic for Women / 715 N. Dodge / Iowa City, IA52240. (publishes a

pamphlet called *Self Help, Fertility and Birth Control - A Feminist approach to Determining Ovulation* for \$1.50)
 ★ Barbara Feldman / 342 E. 15th St. #D / New York, NY 10003 / (212) 475-4490 (info. on fertility awareness and natural birth control)

Cervical Cap Information:

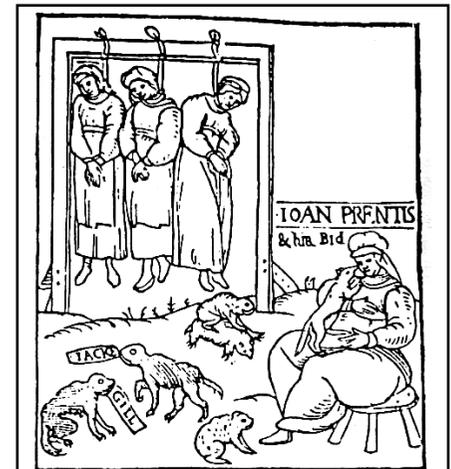
- ★ Natural Women's Health Network / 224 7th St. S.E. / Washington, D.C. 20003 (send for a list of providers - \$2)
- ★ James Koth, MD / 1032 Beacon St. / Brookline, MA 02146
- ★ Boston Feminist Health Collective / P.O. Box 192 / West Somerville, MA 02144 / (617) 924-0270

The book *How To Stay Out of the Gynaecologists Office* has a much larger list of feminist health centres across the U.S.

celibacy and witchcraft, destroyed men's respect for women and legalised the burning, drowning and torture of women..."

Wimmin and their deities became objects of hatred to the Christian missionaries and of alternative scorn and fear to pious ascetics and monks. The priestess mother became something impure, associated with the devil, and her lore an infernal incantation, her very cooking a brewing of poison, now her very existence a source of sin to man. Thus womyn, as mother and priestess (and healer) became womyn as witch. Here is the reason why in all the biblical researches and higher criticism, the scholars never touched the position of wimmin.⁸

Alas, the suppression of the womyn - as healer - went far beyond the witch hunts. From there, wimmin were banned from universities and medical colleges (which taught bullshit 'medicine' anyway, such as bleeding by the use of leeches, water treatments, incantations and religious rites) and carried right over to America where wimmin were "too weak" to study medicine, midwifery was banned and outlawed (in some places, still is) to be replaced by male gynaecologists and obstetricians who hadn't a clue as to female reproductive organs, who performed gynaecological exams and delivered babies under sheets and with their heads turned for "modesty's sake." The midwives, who in most cases knew the most about wimmin's bodies and problems due to generations of sharing techniques, were prevented from acquiring any new useful medical advances and knowledge because they were unlicensed (only doctors had licenses) and banned from medical schools (only men were allowed to



Three 'witches' hanging. From the title page of a contemporary pamphlet on the Third Chelmsford Witch Trial, 1589 (taken from *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*)

study).

Ah, but the 'perfect' place for wimmin in medicine was created - the nurse. A combination of glorified "mommy" and upper class society womyn who performed household duties tirelessly, never questioned, always cheerful, pretty, smiling, subservient. Her position, to support the man yet never compete on the same level. This description is not meant to belittle nurses today but to point out that the creation of the nurse was brought about as a *concession* to the notion of womyn as healer.

The story goes on and on, degrading and demoralising (I leave you to consult the references for excellent reading on the subject). My point in writing this article, this series, is to point out that we can take back what has been stolen from us - the right to heal ourselves, inexpensively, to demystify the body process, to take healing powers we have bestowed blindly in the medical establishment and

to learn to trust ourselves, and to re-learn the herbal and alternative ways that our ancestors taught. Knowledge that has been suppressed and denied for centuries does not come easy due to the current medical establishment's reluctance to loose the power and mon-etary rewards that come from blind acceptance of 'scientists' and 'experts.' Trust yourself and the knowledge of our witch, midwife and healing sisters: a small autonomous step in the direction of taking back an important piece of our existence - our health. Be well!
Anarchy/Equality

SOURCES:

1. Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) p. 1077 (an excellent source book no womyn should be without!).
2. Ibid, p. 1078.
3. Ehrenreich, Barbara, and English, Deidre. *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1973), p. 8-9.
4. Ibid, p. 9.
5. Towler, Jean and Bramall, Joan. *Midwives in History and Society* (England;

- Croom Held Ltd., 1986) p. 33-35
6. Ibid, p. 37
7. Barjola, cited in Walker, p. 1081
8. Stanton, cited in Walker, p. 1079

In addition, some ideas in this article were obtained from Carter, Jenny and Dureiz, Therese. *With Child: Birth Through the Ages* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Mainstream Publishing, 1986)

A method to use in conjunction with mucus signs is temperature charting. After ovulation the basal body temperature is increased due to the surge in progesterone. To record this change, buy a basal thermometer (available at a drug store) which is more accurate. You take your temperature in the morning, first thing, and record it.

Changes in the cervix are also affected by fluctuating hormone levels and can be used along with temperature/mucus signs. To observe cervical signs you insert one or two fingers into your vagina until you feel your cervix (the cervix has been described as feeling like the end of your nose, but softer). Another way to observe your cervix is to actually view it with your own eyes via a plastic speculum (comes in several sizes and available from a nurse, clinic, or wimmin's group). You lie back, insert the speculum, and then use a mirror and a flashlight to view it. As ovulation approaches, the cervix changes by becoming *softer, higher in the vaginal canal* and more difficult to reach, more open, and wetter and slipperier with fertile-type mucus. After ovulation, the cervix changes back becoming firmer and harder, lower, closed and drier. An easy way to remember your most fertile signs is the word S.H.O.W. - soft, high,

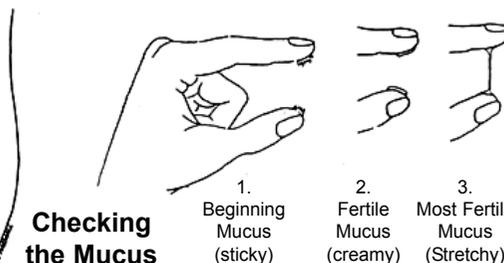
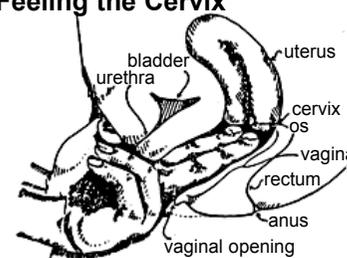
open, wet.

Fertility awareness is most effective when you do the following: Keep accurate charts, strictly follow 'rules', combine mucus and temperature signs and abstain from intercourse on the days you are fertile. This method may seem complex and time consuming but in reality only takes about seven minutes a day to check the signs and chart them (five of these minutes are spent taking your temperature). If this method seems good for you check out one of the sources at the end of this article. Other sources may be wimmin's groups, Planned Parenthood, and private instructors.

As well, there are 'psychic' birth control methods - such as hypocontraception (which uses hypnosis to suppress ovulation) and Lunaception or Lunar fertility cycles (which refers to the fact that wimmin tend to be less fertile when the moon is in the same phase it was at their birth). Both are too complex to go into here; consult *Natural Birth Control Book* for more information. These methods may give an extra "edge" when combined with other natural birth control methods.

There are also some herbs that may cause temporary or permanent sterility. I do not know anyone who has used them, their effects, etcetera. The book *Hygeia*,

Feeling the Cervix



know what to look for, know what normal vaginal mucus is and what is aberrant. Why in this society is it O.K. for a doctor, a total stranger, to drape you up and spread your legs on stirrups to view your vagina but "freaky" for a womyn to do a vaginal self exam or meet in self-help groups for the purpose of helping each other learn? Whose body is it anyway? In overcoming our fears and disgust over our own vaginal secretions - mucus, discharge, menstrual blood, sweat - we stand to gain a world of knowledge and confidence in ourselves, for ourselves.

In learning about natural birth control, basic knowledge of the reproductive system is needed for an understanding of how it works. (The information in the following section was condensed from *Natural Birth Control Book*, chapter on "Ovulation Signs and Fertility Awareness," by Barbara Feldman - see appendix.)

- 1.) Two hormones which control and regulate menstrual cycle - estrogen (dominant before ovulation) and progesterone (dominant after ovulation).
- 2.) The egg can live up to 24 hours *after* ovulation. Sperm deposited in the vagina where mucus is present can fertilize an egg up to 72 hours (3 days) at most. The important thing to remember is that sperm life is short if there is no mucus present.
- 3.) Ovulation occurs approximately 12 to 16 days *before* menstruation in most wimmin (average 14 days). This time span remains consistent for each individual but can vary as a result of stress, diet, travel, infection, etc.
- 4.) Ovulation usually occurs once per cycle. As estrogen levels gradually rise in the beginning of the cycle, cells inside the cervix respond by producing mucus.

The function of mucus during the fertile time is to protect it from the acidic environment inside the vagina, nourish it with glucose, and form channels that guide the sperm towards the fallopian tubes. At the most infertile times mucus forms a plug in the opening of the cervix, keeping sperm and bacteria from entering.

OK, now that we know the basic facts, the next steps involve observing and charting mucus secretions at the outside of the vagina (noting the qualities - stretch ability, colour, texture, and amount). ***This article is not intended to provide all of the necessary information for this method - just basic tenets of how it works. Do not attempt to practice this method on these suggestions alone.*** Read the *Natural Birth Control Book* or other books on fertility signs for the complete scenario. I'm just trying to show how the method works - you follow up with more reading - not enough space here!

OK, here's how it works, roughly. The first sign of any mucus indicates potential fertility, as sperm can survive and wait for the approaching ovulation (sneaky bastards). Usually this beginning mucus is in small amounts and is pasty, thick, white or yellow. It does not stretch (see diagram). *Very fertile* type mucus is stretchy, clear, slippery, and more abundant. It may be brown or pinkish, indicating ovulation. This mucus indicates the time when you are most likely to get pregnant. After ovulation, the mucus tapers off and becomes white and pasty again.

Please note that infection, stress, illness, medication and barrier methods of contraception can alter the mucus or cause confusing changes. When in doubt, *don't* (or use a condom)!

PART TWO:

HEALING COMMON INFECTIONS OF THE VAGINA AND BLADDER

Candida Albicans. Hemophilis. Gardnerella. Trichomonas. Nonspecific Vaginitis. These are the scientific names for a variety of bacterial overgrowths or one-cell organism invasions of the vagina and/or urinary tract, but let's put these things in terms more easily recognizable. Every womyn will, at one time or another in her life, acquire one or more of these infections; for some the infections can reach chronic proportions. Intense itching, pain and soreness, unusually heavy discharge, strong odour; annoying clues that somehow you are not treating your body well. Rather than correcting the source of the problem (i.e. the reason your resistance was lowered enough for infection) many wimmin run to the doctor for a "cure" which in many cases merely masks the real problem, or in many cases worsens it.

What I'm going to try to do is set a scenario to demystify 'medicine' and the body's processes (your body) enough so that we can help ourselves, with as little outside interference as possible. The first step is becoming comfortable with our own bodies, noting their own quirks and irregularities. For example, it's very important that you keep a calendar of your menstrual cycle; if you are prone to a lot of infections, note which days of the month the symptoms worsen or get better. Most important however, is that you start paying attention to the way you live your life, what foods you eat, etc. You want to start looking at your body holistically; that is looking at the whole life process, the way that anything you do to your body has a consequence (negative or positive). A problem that arises is dealt with in respect to your entire body system (i.e. your immunity suppressed, your vaginal pH altered, nutritional defi-

ciencies, etc.). Modern medicine often deals with eliminating one problem that is often merely a symptom of a larger disorder. To do so will only keep the problem reoccurring (how many of you have reoccurring yeast infections, endless trips to the doctor, feeling like shit...) yet it is a vicious circle. In many cases the 'cures' will cause another type of infection (such as the use of Flagyl for Trich, infections can cause a yeast infection). The only way to break this cycle is to treat the entire system and to use our plant allies to correct the manifestations of the illness.

With the holistic approach in mind, let us now try to demystify and conquer some common ailments/problems that affect wimmin.

Vaginitis: A catch-all term for basically three different disorders - yeast (Candida) infections, Trichomonas, and non-specific (usually Gardinella or Hemophilis). Let's start with the two most common.

Candida Albicans (also called Monilla or yeast infection). Symptoms include a white, thick discharge with a sweetish odour, intense itching; and if you can use a vaginal speculum and hand mirror, you can often see white patches on your vaginal walls. This infection is caused by a yeast-like fungus that is normally present in small quantities in your vagina, lower intestine, mouth and stomach. Normally the vagina protects against infection by the occurrence of Doderleins Bacilli, beneficial bacteria which helps keeps the vagina acidic.¹ When this acidity is altered, bacteria such as Candida, which are normally held in check, multiply and overgrow, causing the "infection." There are a number of theories on under what conditions Candida fungi are allowed to

overgrow. The most popular seems to be an increase of estrogen (such as being on the pill or pregnant), as well as a diet deficient in B vitamins, stress, fatigue, and a lot of sugar in the diet. In addition, poor "hygiene," tight-fitting underwear, jeans, leggings and panty hose that don't allow your crotch to breath all contribute to the problem. Some herbal remedies to check the problem include various douches, sitz baths, and poultices. Remember, douching should only be done for medical reasons (more on that later). A sitz bath is when you sit in the bathtub with a few inches of liquid in the tub, your hands and feet out of the water.

The most common herb used in medicinal douches is goldenseal; combinations include:

- ★ Make a past of slippery elm powder and water, apply it to the vaginal tissues to help with the itching. Later, douche with a tea of motherwort or goldenseal or oatstraw.²
- ★ A douche made of a tea of comfrey leaves, goldenseal, chamomile and sage.³
- ★ Sitz bath of tea of goldenseal root, buchu leaves, witch hazel leaves, plantain, myrrh gum, juniper berries and squaw vine.⁴
- ★ Acidophilus. Acidopholus are live bacterial cultures found in yoghurt that can also be grown in other medicines. Lots of alternative wimmin's health manuals recommend using yoghurt, applied to the vagina and surrounding area as relief for yeast infections (as well as eating it regularly for prevention). I feel that due to the fact that a lot of people are allergic to milk and milk products (as well as us vegans out there) it is best to use pure acidopholus, which is available in

changes.⁴ So, if you are on the pill and feeling depressed, rest assured it is not all in your mind.

Another potentially dangerous and health threatening method of birth control is the I.U.D.; a device placed by a doctor into your uterus which functions by irritating the uterus and preventing the already developing embryo with implantation. Some potential effects of the I.U.D. are severe anaemia, perforation (which is what happens when the I.U.D. works its way into the walls of the uterus), and pelvic infection - more common in wimmin with I.U.D.'s (as is an increased chance of contracting gonorrhoea or other sexually transmitted diseases which can lead to permanent sterility). The condom, when used properly, is 97% effective - the same as the I.U.D. but *without the risks*.

Barrier methods, such as condoms, diaphragm, and cervical cap offer almost no side effects (occasional irritation from spermicide used with a diaphragm) yet are they as effective? When used properly, they are indeed, particularly the condom and cervical cap. The condom, in this age of AIDS, should be in the pocket of every womyn who has sex with men, whether she is using another method or not. The condom, unlike the pill, protects against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (the pill actually increases the chance of contracting certain S.T.D.'s due to it's role in changing the vaginal Ph). Using a condom correctly entails that it is put on the erect penis before it enters the vagina, due to the presence of some viable sperm in pre-ejaculatory fluid and withdrawn promptly after the man has an orgasm so that no sperm leaks out. To prevent breakage use a water-based lubricant (like K-Y, etc.) not Vaseline as it will dete-

riorate the condom. The diaphragm and cervical cap are two barrier methods worth looking into. The diaphragm is a shallow rubber cup with a spring mechanism in the rim, which is inserted high in the vagina with spermicidal jelly within two hours of intercourse. The cervical cap is a small, thimble-like device that fits over your cervix and can be left in the vagina for days (not during menstruation). The cervical cap seems to afford a higher degree of protection simply because wimmin can leave it in longer and therefore may be 'spontaneous'. (For more info. see Sources) Both devices must be fit by a doctor.

NATURAL METHODS

Natural methods of contraception/birth control/conscious conception are not as confusing and complex as you may have heard. Basically, what these methods (i.e., ovulation signs, fertility awareness, etc.) entail is what this series of articles is all about - demystifying your own body, noting the changes that signal approaching ovulation, becoming comfortable with recognizing what secretions are and what they mean, etc. In learning natural methods you will become more attuned to your body, what you eat, what medicines you take, your emotional state - the whole picture, not just the isolated reproductive organs. Natural birth control goes far beyond its intention of just finding out when you are most fertile and then avoiding intercourse on those days. In overcoming taboos about touching yourself and your secretions and viewing your cervix and vagina with a speculum, mirror and flashlight, you are learning about your body, your life. Infections, for example, are easy to treat yourself if you

womyn out there who is on birth control pills (or an I.U.D. for that matter, it is equally as dangerous) to research their method (an excellent book on the dangers of the pill called *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill* was written by a womyn, Barbara Seaman, who lobbied congress in the early 70's to force the pill and I.U.D. manufacturers to include a detailed patient warning that is included when you are given the pill or an I.U.D. by the doctor). Read carefully this patient warning - after weighing the risks you may want to reconsider.

The pill is basically composed of the synthetic hormones estrogen and progesterin (the amount varies with each type or brand) and works by basically tricking the body's hormonal system into thinking the body is already pregnant; the brain does not send the monthly message to the ovaries to release the egg, so there is no ovulation and real 'period' on the pill. You simply stop taking them for a week and the hormone levels drop off sharply, causing the citrine lining to disintegrate.

Any drug strong enough to affect a major body system is also bound to affect that system (and possibly others) in a negative way. The pill changes your entire body's biochemistry and the way you assimilate nutrients; the longer you take it, the more damage occurs. The pill creates deficiencies of the following vitamins: C, thiamin (B1), riboflavin, pyridoxine (B12), folic acid, and E. The nutritional alterations are suspected in playing a role in some of the pill's side effects, including changes in the cervix, depression, irritability, birth defects, susceptibility to infections, and post-pill menstrual disorders.¹ Womyn who insist on the pill should be aware of these deficiencies and take supple-

ments. I would strongly advise against taking birth control pills and being a total vegetarian (vegan) unless you are extra sure you are getting enough of the nutrients from the food you eat. Study a good vegan nutritional guide and make sure you are eating well (in other words, you can't be a "convenience vegan" and be on the pill).

Most serious effects of the pill are its effects on the cardiovascular system. Pills have been implicated in the deaths of many womyn due to clotting disorders, strokes, heart attacks, etc. Those womyn who have a herstory of these problems in their family should definitely not be taking the pill. Some scary statistics: "Studies have shown that pill users have three to five times more risk of heart attack than other womyn..."² Pill users are twice as likely to die from vascular diseases as non-users between 25-34, and four and one half times as likely to die between 35 and 44.³ As well, the pill increases the growth of certain types of tumours, such as fibroids, an increase in cervical cancer, and may cause pre-diabetic or diabetic conditions due to abnormal glucose tolerance and insulin production.

As well, a "minor" side effect of the pill, which turns out to be not so minor, is depression. Because of the deficiencies of the B vitamins and folic acid caused by the pill many pill users become seriously depressed and even suicidal (the B vitamins help maintain proper mental functioning). In London, the Royal College of Physicians found that the rate of suicide among pill users was two to three times as high as among other womyn; as well, other British researchers have established that one out of every three pill users who were studied showed depressive personality

health food stores. If you insist on yoghurt make sure it is unpasturised and contains live lactobacilli (in health food stores - none of that Dannon shit you get in the supermarket). But why not just use acidophilus; get a good brand - expensive but far more potent. Acidophilus should always be bought fresh (should be dated) and stored in the refrigerator.

Also suggested if you are prone to a lot of yeast infections is the following daily vitamin therapy (individual needs may vary).⁵

Vitamin A - 25,000-50,000 I.U.
Vitamin B complex - high
Vitamin B1 - 25-50 mg
Vitamin B2 - 25-50 mg
Vitamin B6 - 25-50 mg
Vitamin D - 400 I.U.
Vitamin E
Vitamin C - 1000-2000 mg
Pantothenic Acid - 100 mg

A gynaecologist will most likely prescribe the fungicidal antibiotic Nystatin (monostat cream or suppositories) which works well yet is a bit taxing on your system if you have repeated yeast infections (as well as expensive) so why not try one of these herbal remedies first? Also, take a long, hard look at your lifestyle. Be sure you're getting adequate amounts of sleep and rest. Watch your sugar intake! Avoid white sugar like poison! Diet is very important - make sure you are eating foods rich in B vitamins (dark green leafy veggies, etc).

There are a lot of theories dealing with the negative effects yeast has on the body. So if you find you are prone to a lot of yeast infections you may want to check out a few of the many books writ-

ten on the 'yeast syndrome.' These approaches deal mainly with cutting out foods from your diet that have yeast and mould fungus in them - cheese, alcohol, mushrooms, yeasted breads, etc. By cutting out as many yeast foods as possible an improvement may be noticed.

Another common infection is **Trichomonas**, a one-cell parasitic organism that can be seen quite easily under a microscope. The presence of the Trich. organism in the vagina causes a greenish-yellow discharge which smells quite bad, pain, and itching. Standard medical treatment will include metrodiatole (brand name Flagyl), a very powerful and dangerous drug which lowers your white blood cell count, may be carcinogenic, and (of course) should never be taken while pregnant. Flagyl also produces intolerance to alcohol - if you take the drug and drink even the slightest bit of alcohol you will become violently ill. So if you want to avoid this potentially dangerous drug, some herbal remedies include:

★ Straining a tea of chaparral and slippery elm, periwinkle and oatstraw, and then gently douching with it. You can also drink the tea. Also a clove of garlic which is wrapped in gauze or cheesecloth and inserted into the vagina (leave a string of gauze so you can remove it later) is said to produce oxygen and sulphur and has been used medically for centuries.⁶

★ A douche made of the teas of myrrh, goldenseal, twice a day for one or two days.⁷

★ Warm water / apple cider vinegar douche. The lactic acid in the vagina kills the Trich.⁸

When you are stricken with a

Trichomonas infection it is very important that you realize that Trich is transmitted sexually. Make sure any male sexual partner wears a condom. He can harbour the infection without showing any symptoms and then reinfect you, so this is important. Any remedy that you are using to get rid of the infection should also be used by your partner (if male, he can drink the teas). If you opt for Flagyl often the doctor will prescribe it for the both of you.

Now a few words about prevention. A recent study has suggested that frequent douching for non-medicinal purposes (i.e. to feel "fresh and clean") has been linked to pelvic inflammatory diseases, which if left untreated can result in ectopic pregnancy and /or sterility. In a paper entitled "Association Between Vaginal Douching and Pelvic Inflammatory Disease," authors Pal Wolner - Hanssen et al compared the douching habits of 100 consecutive municipal hospital patients with PID with 762 randomly selected women (controls) and 119 wimmin thought to have PID but in whom the diagnosis was not confirmed by laparoscopy and/or biopsy (internal controls). They found that current douching was more common among those with PID than among random or internal controls. Among current douchers, PID was significantly related to frequency of douching.⁹ Scary isn't it? Don't buy the bullshit that the media tries to sell you about scented douches, 'feminine sprays', etc. They're all iatrogenic and designed to make wimmin feel ashamed and dirty about their natural body functions. Some discharge is normal and necessary; it is how your vagina cleans itself, sheds old cells and expels dirt, etc. If you want to clean out any secretions or lubricants after sex, etc.

use vinegar and water or just plain water. Better yet, take a sitz bath when you douche, always do it gently and never hold the bag above your waist. Better still is to use an infant syringe, available at drug stores. Douching forcefully may make the infection worse by forcing it up into your uterus, where it can lead to PID.

You should also be aware that whatever birth control method you are using (other than condoms or natural/rhythm method) might be responsible for aggravating your infection. Birth control pills and anti-biotics upset your body's pH balance, thus making it easier for the infection-causing organisms to grow and flourish in your vagina. IUD's are often responsible for making the membranes of your vagina more susceptible to infection. Even spermicidal creams/jellies/foams may cause an allergic reaction to sensitive tissues. Realizing that your birth control method may be responsible for reoccurring infections may prompt you to change to a method less taxing on your system (more on birth control in later articles).

Bladder Infections - They really suck. You always feel like you have to pee, and when you do it's excruciatingly painful and may be mixed with blood and/or pus. The reason wimmin get them more often than men is due to wimmin's shorter urethras, which allows bacteria to enter the bladder more easily. Self help? At the first sign of a bladder infection, start drinking huge amounts of water, as much as you can stand - at least three or four big glasses every hour. This may be enough to flush the bacteria out before they have a chance to multiply and really cause problems. Also drinking cranberry juice (pure - no sugar!) may help; the acidity in the juice

PART FOUR:

BIRTH CONTROL (IS IT CONTROLLING YOU?)

Controlling population has become a serious query in this age of dwindling resources and over population of the planet. But should not wanting a baby (for whatever reason) also seriously endanger your health? As wimmin we have had to take the responsibility for our sexual actions with men in regards to the very real possibility of pregnancy; throughout his/herstory, this responsibility has often been wrought with moral overtones, (i.e. having a child is 'punishment' for sexual activity). And where did the sexual revolution bring us? A pill of "liberation" - under-tested, over-simplified - the birth control pill thought to be a release for wimmin often became their death.

By and large, the means to contraception available to us today have been designed by men and marketed by major pharmaceutical companies in the interest of profits first. Interesting to note that here in the U.S. the majority of doctors are men; in China, where over half the doctors are wimmin, a male birth control pill is being developed.

This particular article in the series took me a very long time to research and write; the information available on natural methods was limited to a few books here and there scattered in natural food stores and wimmin's health centres. As well, I didn't feel I could advocate natural or barrier birth control when I myself had been on the pill for six years. While coming off the pill and researching this article I discovered a lot of horrifying information on exactly how the pill works and some of the effects it has on the body - effects which I have taken seriously - from depression brought from vitamin and mineral depletion to life-threatening conditions such as strokes, heart-attacks, and cancer. I urge any

THE HEALTHY WOMYN'S DIET

Avoid Entirely:

- ★ White sugar
- ★ White flour
- ★ Lards, particularly hydrogenated vegetable shortening
- ★ Caffeine
- ★ Table salt
- ★ Meat (!)

As Little As Possible:

- ★ Milk
- ★ Ice cream
- ★ Cheese
- ★ Butter
- ★ Alcohol

Daily Rainbow:

- ★ Whole grains; yellow millet corn, brown rice, wheat and rye
- ★ Legumes; green peas, beans, lentils, tofu
- ★ Collard greens; mustard greens, chard
- ★ Orange fruits/veggies; carrots, squash, sweet potatoes
- ★ Red fruits and veggies; apples, cabbage, tomatoes, strawberries
- ★ Bananas are high in potassium

- ★ Oil
- ★ Safflower oil; a couple of tablespoons added on a salad or mixed with apple or grape juice. Don't cook it!

(Taken partially from *Essential Supplements For Women* (P.95) see references)

Yeah, I know if you are poor it's tough to eat anything but potatoes, stews, macaroni and cheese, or ramen, but is your health worth spending a little extra? [Especially if you drink alcohol/smoke pot/do other drugs which deplete your body of many vitamins and minerals]. Once you check it out you'll see that it's not more expensive, especially not any more expensive than meat! Get a good vegetarian/vegan cookbook, gather some friends and get healthy!

will kill the bacteria, which are alkaline, thus refurbishing your bladder to its more acidic state. If you're in the throes of a painful infection, you can try douching with a mixture of acidophilus, cranberry juice and garlic.¹⁰ The conventional way of treating a bladder infection is with anti-biotics. The problem is that once your infection is cleaned up you may be stricken with a yeast infection due to the anti-biotics' effect on your vaginal pH. A lot must be said for preventative measures. If you're prone to a lot of bladder infections always pee after you have sexual intercourse; the friction may have forced bacteria up your urethra into your bladder. And the age-old warning that your mom always taught you but never explained why - always

wipe from front to back after you've gone to the bathroom. Bacteria which is perfectly normal and healthy in your lower intestine may cause a serious infection if it finds its way into your vagina or urethra. Also you should drink lots of water every day whether you have an infection or not. It helps to eliminate toxins through your skin and urine and it is good for your skin anyway.

Well, that about wraps it up. The key word here in overcoming infections is prevention! Take a look at your life and the way you treat your body. Stop making meals out of Jolt and candy (once my dietary staples)! Remember that alcohol is a diuretic and may worsen a bladder infection, so cut out drinking - if you have one that is! Be Well!

SOURCES:

1. Mills, Simony. *Dictionary of Modern Herbalism* (U.K: Thomsons Ltd, 1985.), p. 210.
2. Parvati, Jeannine. *Hygeia: A Woman's Herbal* (U.S.A: Freestone Collective, 1978), p. 91.
3. Ammer, Christine. *The A to Z of Woman's Health* (New York: Everet House, 1983), p. 545.
4. Mowrey, Daniel B. *Scientific Validation of Herbal Medicine* (U.S.A: Cormorant Books, 1986), p. 271.
5. Ibid.
6. Parvati, p. 92.
7. Ammer, p. 437.
8. Tierra, Mitchael. *Planetary Herbology* (Santa Fe: Lotus Press, 1988), p. 335.
9. Wolner-Nanssen, Pat et al. "Association Between Vaginal Douching and Pelvic Inflammatory Disease". *Journal of American Medical Association*, Vol. 263, Number 14, April 11, 1990. p. 1936-1941.
10. Pavarti, p. 95.

A special welcome to planet Earth to Keegen Dakkar Lomanto, born July 11, 1990 at 10:08 PM. Blessed be sweet child! Congratulations Andrea and John!

PART THREE:

MENSTRUATION: POWER OR WEAKNESS?

Curse or blessing? Hate being a womyn or relish the sign that you are one? Every month brings a constant reminder of the female links to the cycle of the Earth, waves, and the moon. A reminder of the ability to conceive and bear children. In modern society the trend is to obliterate all such signs, to get past the pain and blood and mess. A womyn's period has become her enemy. A stealer of energy, time and sanity.

Once menstrual blood was thought to have great powers. Most words for menstruation also meant such things as supernatural, spirit, deity. Like the Latin sacer, old Arabian words for "pure" and "impure" both applied to menstrual blood and that only.¹ All wimmin were thought to possess supernatural powers of insight, intuition, and healing during their bleeding. Post-menopausal wimmin possessed the most power since their 'wise-blood' ceased to fall to the ground and was kept inside. Such wimmin were often matriarchs and clan leaders in early societies and such were the first to burn during witch-hunts by Church & state. The Bible's story of Adam was uplifted from an old female-orientated creation story that retold the creation of man from clay and moonblood. As well, the Koran's creation story told that Allah "made man out of flowing blood"; however, in the pre-Islamic Arabia, All was the goddess of creation called AL-LAT.²

Winimin were holy. Wimmin had power. Wimmin and the Earth were intrinsically linked. All balanced. The rise of patriarchal religion put a stop to all of this. To the Catholic Church in particular, wimmin were dirty and unclean spiritually. They took this special, holy time for wimmin and defiled it until it became the opposite of its original meanings - dirty, coarse, ignorant. St. Jerome said

use miso or tamari; and if you haven't become a vegetarian yet - consider this, from *Essential Supplements For Women*; "Some nutritionists warn that too much protein pulls minerals away from the body. Meat may also contain traces of steroids, antibiotics, and other drugs injected into the animal during its lifetime. Furthermore, the saturated fats in meat stimulate the growth of certain intestinal bacteria that take inactive forms of estrogen and covert them to active forms, contributing to all the symptoms associated to PMS type A, such as anxiety, irritability, and moodiness" (p. 95). As far as supplements, choline "brain food" has proven ability to improve learning retention, but its main

role is as a fat emulsifier and clears fatty deposits from the liver.¹⁶ Other supplements include beta carotene, B complex vitamins, C, calcium, Iodine, and a multi-mineral.

Above all, remember to take it easy on yourself. Try to remain as stress-free during the week before your period (easier said than done). Allow yourself some time to relax to prepare for the special, life-affirming time called menstruation. Turn a problem into an ally, a sickness into a strength, a time of moodiness into a time of increased awareness, intuition, and affirmation of the special links that wimmin share with the Earth, waves and moon. Happy Bleeding!



SOURCES:

1. Walker, Barbara, *The Women's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 635-638.
2. Ibid., p. 637.
3. Ibid., p. 638.
4. Weed, Susan, *Healing Wise* (New York, Ash Tree Publishing, 1989), p. 41 (Read this book - it will change everything you think you know about healing, medicine and wimmin).
5. Reuben, Carolyn and Priestly, Joan, *Essential Supplements for Women* (New York: Putnam, 1988), p. 71.
6. Parvati, Jeannine, *Hygeia: A Women's Herbal* (U.S.A. Freestone Collective, 1978), p. 24-26.
7. Reuben and Priestly, p. 68.
8. Weed, p. 217.
9. Reuben and Priestly, p. 77.
10. Dingfelder, James R., "Primary Dysmenorrhoea Treatment with Prostaglandin Inhibitors: a Review," *The American Journal of Obstetricians and Gynaecology* 140: 8 (August 15, 1981, 974-879), cited in Reuben.
11. Reuben and Priestly, p. 80.
12. Parvati, p. 33.
13. Reuben and Priestly, p. 87.
14. Ammer, Christine, *A to Z of Woman's Health* (New York, Everett House, 1983), p. 286.
15. Mowrey, Daniel B, *Scientific Validation of Herbal Medicine* (U.S.A. Cormorant Books, 1986), p. 185.
16. Reuben and Priestly, p. 93.

cause fluid retention, something you definitely don't want around the time of your period. Another excellent way to relieve congestion to the pelvic area and to dissipate cramps, but is not often discussed, is having an orgasm, whether through masturbating or sexual activity with another. Makes sense, eh? If you had a cramp in your foot would you try to massage it or take drugs? So much for the old adage that you should never have sex during your period!

Often with bad cramps comes abnormally heavy bleeding that is called menorrhagia. If your periods are extremely heavy with excessive bleeding lasting more than five days, large clots passed, and you use more than roughly 12 pads or tampons per period; if you are constantly soaking through even the heaviest pads, then you are bleeding more than you should. You should definitely be checked out by a gynaecologist, to rule out tumours, uterine cancers, etc.

One of the main causes of menorrhagia is low thyroid activity (hypothyroidism) yet if you are easily fatigued, have dry skin, or circulatory disturbances, this may be your problem. There are natural substances that may help your body make adequate hormones, including; kelp (yes, again) as well as iodine and the amino acid L-tyrosine.¹³ Another cause of profuse bleeding is that the smooth muscle fibres in your uterus are weak. Make sure you are getting enough protein, such as found in beans, seeds and grains. As for supplements, zinc and iron (though not at the same time) as well as the B complex, which can be easily obtained through liberal use of brewer's yeast, all are recommended. Note that sugar steals B vitamins from your system, so you should be wise to eliminate it from

your diet (even if you don't have menorrhoea!).

Various herbal remedies include yarrow (avoid if pregnant), red raspberry, shepherd's purse, and cinnamon¹⁴, as well as this astringent combination (taken four times daily):

- ★ Cranesbill root (geranium macilatum)
- ★ Raspberry leaves
- ★ Witch hazel leaves
- ★ Ura-ursi
- ★ Shepherd's purse
- ★ Black haw bark¹⁵

PMS - the dreaded "crazies" which are often the worst the week before your period. A time of feeling very emotional, crying easily, mood swings, anxiety, bloating, cravings, and/or depression. Most likely these are symptoms of underlying nutritional deficiencies. If you eat a lot of sugar, junk food, etc. you are setting yourself up for violent mood swings due to the elevation and subsequent drop of your blood sugar level. You may not be able to eliminate all of these symptoms entirely, due to the fact that some change in mood is going to occur due to the drop in estrogen and progesterone necessary to produce the menstrual flow. Extreme symptoms, however, can be helped by changes in diet and lifestyle. The first thing you need to start doing is recording everything you eat and drink, the PMS symptoms that you have, and any exercise you are getting. Do this for a couple of months.

The best treatment for PMS works on three fronts; improving nutrition, reducing stress, and having adequate exercise. See "The Healthy Womyn's Diet," the best "diet" to help eliminate PMS symptoms (see chart). Instead of salt

in the Bible, "Nothing is so unclean than a woman in her periods. What she touches she causes to become unclean." From the eighth to eleventh century, no menstruating womin were allowed in church. Ah, but those are antiquated beliefs of a superstitious age, right? Unfortunately, these ideas continue up to this very day. At present time, just as in the Middle Ages, womin in the Catholic Church are not allowed to become priests (priestesses) because of the Church's edict that a menstruating priest would pollute the altar.³ The Church's misogyny goes so far as to include a whole different set of explanations for post-menopausal womin who could, of course, be exempted from this provision.

In "primitive" times, a womyn's period was no disability but a time for celebration, of being one with the Earth. In some cultures menstruating womin squatted by plants and let their blood nourish the Earth and vegetation. Wimin in some Native American cultures voluntarily secluded themselves with other menstruating womin; a time for contemplation, visions, truths. One story tells that the Native American sweatlodge was given to the men to still their jealousy of the wimin's moontime rites.⁴

But all of this has changed. Now, we try to forget that we bleed, forget our connections to the Earth and to other wimin. With the rise of "scientific"/medical culture, menstruation came to be looked upon as a debilitating, sickly time for wimin. Victorian wimin were urged to stay in bed the whole time they were bleeding lest they hurt themselves. Bleeding and the whole menstrual cycle had gone from being symbols of wimin's power and strength to

signs of wimin's "inherent weakness" and frailty (sic). Even today, wimin are made to feel dirty, ashamed, and uncomfortable. A multi-million dollar industry has been built around "feminine hygiene" and the secrecy of "that time of the month." No one need ever know you are bleeding - not with sanitised, deodorant "protection." I believe a lot of wimin feel pain/are in lousy moods because of the denial of this powerful time of the month - we suffer our "dirty secret" in silence. Hating the fact that you bleed every month or cursing that you are a womyn will not make it stop. On the contrary, all this rage and self-hatred may make your period worse. And anyway, what's so bad about taking a day or two for yourself every month to take it easy and feel lousy or emotional or whatever? Instead of thinking "how can I obliterate, annihilate, forget..." How about "How can this problem be my ally? What can I learn from this? How does this bleeding pain make me stronger?"

Your period need not cause you great, unbearable pain however. If it does, perhaps it is your body trying to tell you something. No meat! More calcium! Hey, slow down! Listen to your body, don't mask your pain in a haze of drugs and frustration.

The pain, so vivid, I can remember well. Trying to struggle through classes in junior high school and high school, the pain felt like someone was scraping out my insides with a dull knife. Passing out, throwing up, expelling one-inch blood clots, tranquilizers, sedatives, and finally the pill. My doctor told me, "If it's any consolation, it'll get better when you have a baby." I was 12 years old. If only I had known there were other ways; that I didn't have to suffer silently and dread

my bleed. So much of what we could do ourselves, what we eat, our moods, surroundings, environmental stresses, etc. affect the way our body reacts and the way we eliminate the various toxins and poisons from what we eat and take in from the poisoning of the Earth. With a bit of foresight, understanding and knowledge, a "curse" can be turned into a blessing indeed.

Your menstrual cycle involves your entire body - brain, glands, organs, hormones, etc. Basically what is affected are two sections of the brain - the hypothalamus and the pituitary glands, and two organs - ovaries and the uterus, and three hormones - Follicle Stimulating (FSH), Luteinizing (LH) and Progesterone. The first problem we will look at is absent menses or amenorrhoea. Contrary to what wimmin have been told throughout the ages, menstrual bleeding is a sign of health, not sickness.

If menstrual bleeding does not occur before the age of 16 it is called primary amenorrhoea; if it has occurred but after a few years it is called secondary. Amenorrhoea can be caused by a number of things, the most obvious being pregnancy, a tumour, or a disease. However, any great manipulation of your body weight (body fat difference) can knock the cycle out of sync. For example, extremes in athletic training or dieting to where your body fat drops below a certain percentage can stop menstruation as can extreme obesity. Other causes can be:

- ★ Malfunctioning glands
- ★ Malnutrition (most notably deficiencies in B6 and zinc)
- ★ Metabolic problems - diabetes, liver disease, thyroid levels (abnormally high

or low)

- ★ Certain drugs such as morphine, nitroglycerine, thallium, or temporary effect from stopping the pill.⁵

As said before, menstrual bleeding is the sign of a healthy woman. Those women who follow a strict fruitarian diet often find that their periods stop. A lot of new-age jerks who advocate this diet believe that menstruating is the sign of poison being eliminated, and once you stop eating anything but breads, sprouts and fruit, you will stop bleeding and never have to go through menopause. Woman-hating bullshit, I say. As well, this society's focus on being extremely fit or extremely muscular can also lead a woman to diet so excessively or train so hard that her periods stop. Not good and not healthy. One result of amenorrhoea for an extended period of time is osteoporosis, because lack of estrogen will permit mineral loss to occur.⁶

And now for some herbal/alternative ways to help bring on menstruation:

- ★ Catnip tea
- ★ Burdock
- ★ Angelica - 3/8 teaspoon of root powder
- ★ Blue cohosh
- ★ Marigold; pennyroyal (not oil - extremely poisonous!)

Supplements: vitamin B6, B12, folic acid, zinc, thyroid, B-complex, calcium, magnesium.⁷

Irregular menstruation is when your cycle varies widely - you never know how long you're going to bleed or when. Causes may include a malfunction of the thyroid, high stress, deficient B vitamin, disease or tumours, drugs (even smoking pot), poor diet, and bad posture.

Supplements include B complex, B6, C, zinc, lecithin, L-tyrosine, thyroid - glandular, and kelp. Kelp is a sea vegetable high in calcium, potassium, magnesium, sodium and tin, as well as silicon, aluminium, bromine and iodine. Kelp is also high in carotenes (which help prevent cancers) and also a supply of at least average amounts of all other vitamins.⁸ Sea vegetables are a woman's ally whether she is having problems with her cycle or not. Complete, whole foods, sea vegetables such as hijiki, dulse, and kelp should be staples in every woman's diet.

Painful menstruation: Cramps - this problem affects as many as 70% of American women.⁹ Cramps are painful muscle contractions which vary from minor dull aches to debilitating, frightening spasms, which keep some women drugged and in bed for one or two days out of the month. Painful menstruation, called dysmenorrhoea, should always be brought to the attention of a physician who should check for cancer, endometriosis, PID or congenital defects. For the woman for whom no underlying problem is found, the usual cause is recognized as blood congestion in the uterus (which is why your doctor may tell you your cramps may get better after childbirth, due to increase in blood supply to the uterus).¹⁰

So, if you have moderate or severe cramps, the logical solution would be to increase the foods and activities that will improve blood circulation to the area, helping to provide oxygen and nutrients to the uterine muscles. In the book *Essential Supplements for Women*, authors C. Rueben and J. Priestly cite calcium and magnesium deficiencies as a primary cause of dysmenorrhoea. "Adequate magnesium is necessary for

the muscles to relax. A lack of magnesium leads to muscle spasms and to under use of calcium by the body, even when adequate calcium is consumed. Calcium, in turn, is also needed for proper neuromuscular function. 'Both calcium and magnesium are considered to be natural tranquilisers, soothing irritated muscles and nerves' (p. 79). Make sure you are eating foods high in these minerals, which include nuts and dark leafy green vegetables. As you vegans out there, it is extremely important to eat nuts, almonds especially, and dark green veggies such as kale. To be on the safe side, take a supplement (Calcium is often better absorbed when combined with vitamins C and D).

Exercise as well can help ease cramps, particularly some yoga stretches and positions (check out a book on yoga for the exact ones).

Some herbal remedies for dysmenorrhoea include: Raspberry leaf tea; the aptly named crampbark, which is high in vitamin C, increases capillary permeability, permits flow of nutrients into muscles and waste products out¹¹; Chamomile tea; valerian root; and dandelion blossom tea. The following recipes are also recommended:

- ★ Equal parts (of) mugwort, crampbark, oatstraw, chamomile (or)
- ★ Equal parts (of) yarrow, mint and elderflowers.¹²

It should also be noted that smoking marijuana (*canabis sativa*) considerably lessens the pain of menstrual cramps, being a muscle relaxant. However, you should note that women who smoke marijuana heavily often have irregular menstrual cycles and often have difficulty conceiving. Also marijuana may also