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4 Reasons Your Lady Parts Smell Funkier Than Usual

DECEMBER 22, 2016 By BARBARA BRODY



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Ever get that not-so-fresh feeling? No, it doesn't mean that you need



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to douche. (In fact, experts say that [douching is pretty much always a bad idea](#).) But you shouldn't ignore a funky odor coming from your nether regions, either. Here are a few common reasons why you might be giving off a less than pleasant scent. (Lose up to 25 pounds in 2 months—and look more radiant than ever—with *Prevention's* new [Younger In 8 Weeks plan!](#))

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OK, we just said not to ignore the problem. But do you really even have a problem? Your vagina isn't supposed to smell like roses, and a lot of women think that there's something wrong when there isn't, says Lauren Streicher, MD, medical director of the Northwestern Medicine Center for [Sexual Health and Menopause](#) and author of *[Sex Rx: Hormones, Health, and Your Best Sex Ever](#)*. "It shouldn't smell offensive, but there is a [normal vaginal odor](#)," she explains. "A woman who was taught that her genitals are nasty at a young age is more apt to perceive a [bad] odor when nothing is abnormal."

How to sort it out? If you smell like you always have, you're probably just fine. When in doubt, ask your gynecologist for reassurance.

MORE: [6 Vagina Problems Every Woman Should Know About](#)





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You're leaking pee.

"When you talk about vaginal odor, the first thing you need to figure out is whether it is in fact coming from the vagina, or is it really a genital odor?" says Streicher. "For a lot of women, [it's incontinence](#)." Sometimes the problem is obvious, because you know that you're [wetting yourself](#). In other instances, however, women have just a small amount of leakage that they're not really aware of—they only notice the odor. Since the root of this issue is external (urine hanging around your genitals and/or underwear), showering and changing clothes should do the trick. But do tell your doc if you often have trouble making it to the bathroom on time. There are meds and other interventions that can help.

MORE: [18 Tips To Control Incontinence](#)



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You're harboring a missing tampon.

It sounds crazy, but Streicher says that lots of women insert a tampon and forget to take it out. Maybe you're at the end of [your period](#) but put one in "just in case," and then it slips your mind because your time of the month was ending, anyway. Or perhaps you inserted a new tampon without taking the first one out. Assuming it's lingered in there for a while, the smell will be really strong, "like the zoo," says Streicher. The fix is—you guessed it—to get the tampon out. You doctor can easily remove it, or you can take a crack at it yourself: Lie flat on your back and put two fingers deep into the vagina.

"Women can probably get it out themselves, but most of the time they don't even know it's there," says Streicher. It's the smell that [sends them to the doctor's office](#) (as it should!).



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PRETTY VECTORS/SHUTTERSTOCK

The bacteria in your vagina are out of whack.

"The most common cause of vaginal odor is an imbalance in the normal flora in the vagina," which causes a [fishy scent, irritation, and thin discharge](#), says Streicher. The bad guys can take over anytime, but it's most apt to happen after your period or [sex](#), because both blood and semen can throw off your

natural pH.

If it turns into a full-blown infection (bacterial vaginosis), you'll need antibiotics. But in many cases you can catch the problem before it calls for meds. Streicher tells patients to try [RepHresh gel](#), which corrects the pH balance in the vagina. You should notice a major improvement after two treatments, says Streicher. If you don't, it's time to call your doctor (and probably get a prescription).

What about [yeast infections](#)? Those might cause a slight yeasty scent, but odor is rarely the main complaint. (Itching and thick, white discharge are more common.) And as for those special vaginal washes, save your money. "They're really just vulvar (external) washes, and you don't need them," says Streicher. "They won't help with infections, and for regular cleansing plain soap and water is fine."

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