

UAP OLD MUTUAL

# Afya News

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## SEXUAL HEALTH



# ♀ WOMEN'S HEALTH

## Contraceptives and Fertility

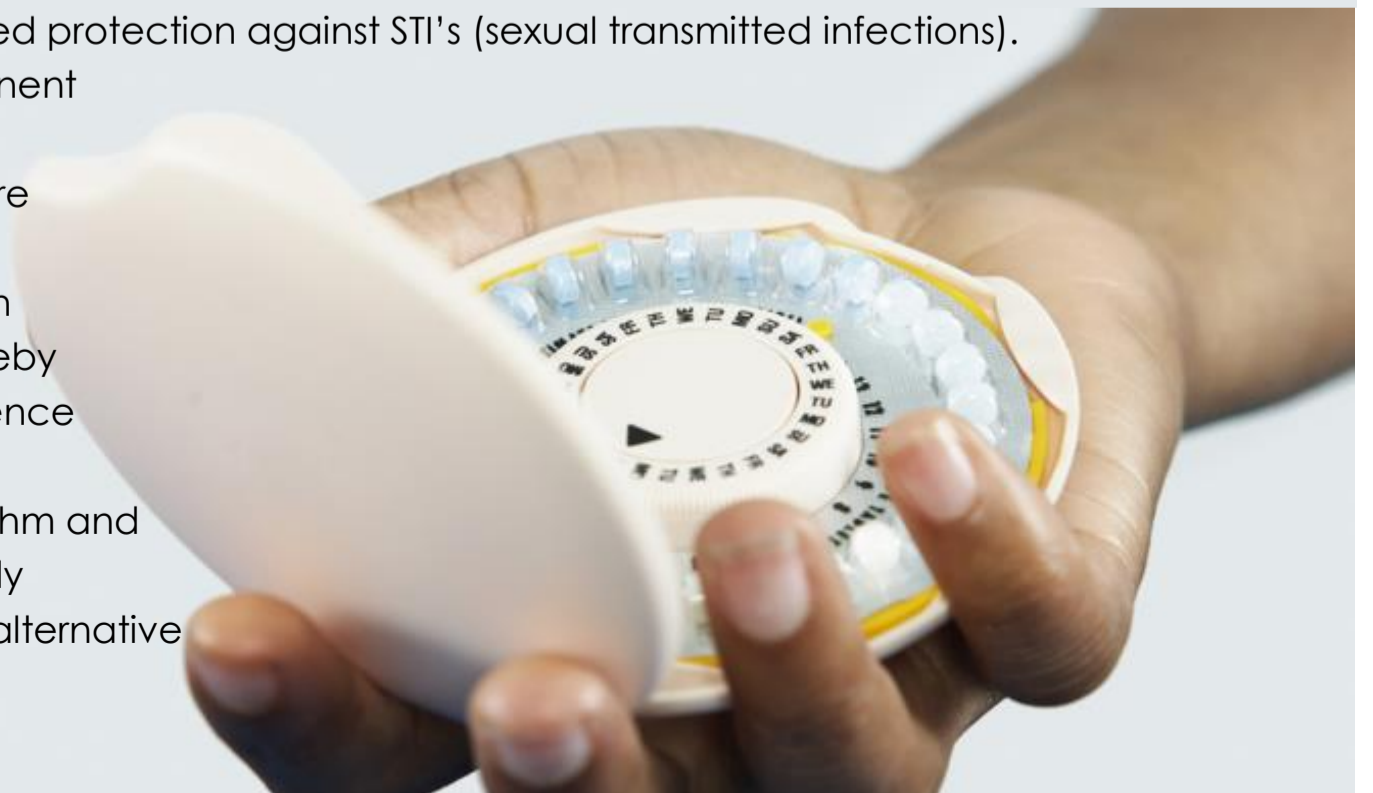


**C**ontraceptives enable a woman to keep her reproductive health in check by determining when to get pregnant. For those who are mothers already, it's particularly important so as to birth space their children accordingly.

It is important to consult a reproductive health practitioner before starting any method of family planning. This is so because family planning is individualized and what suits one woman may not necessarily work for another.

### Birth control methods

1. **Hormonal methods** (oral pills, injections, implants and vaginal rings) – they contain synthetic hormones which stop ovaries from releasing eggs each month or by thickening cervical mucus hence sperms cannot pass through.
  - Oral pill comes in two forms; combined pill (progesterone and estrogen) and progesterone only pill.
  - The injection can last for two up to five years depending on the plan. It is advisable to visit a doctor for injections, prescriptions and placement of vaginal rings or implants to avoid any complications.
2. **Intra-uterine devices (IUD's)** – these are T-shaped devices which have strings and are inserted into the uterus thus inhibiting fertilization. Examples are copper IUD and Mirena and can last up to five years.
3. **Barrier methods** – they include male & female condoms, diaphragm and cervical cap. Apart from preventing pregnancy, condoms offer an added protection against STI's (sexual transmitted infections).
4. **Surgical sterilization**– this is a permanent method. It includes tubal ligation where a woman's fallopian tubes are blocked hence the egg cannot reach the uterus for fertilization. Men also can undergo vasectomy whereby the sperm duct are cut and tied; hence semen does not contain sperms.
5. **Natural methods** – They include rhythm and withdrawal methods. They are mostly applicable where there is no other alternative especially in war torn areas.





## Factors to Consider When Choosing Contraceptive



1. **Background** – these include social-economic, culture and religion. These may not allow use of certain contraceptives such as condoms whereas the financial status of a woman affects the choice made depending on its affordability.
2. **The number of children** – this determines whether to use a short term or long term method.
3. Existence of any medical problems such as diabetes may hinder use of some methods.
4. **Sexual activities of a woman**– most women fear unwanted pregnancies over HIV/AIDS & other sexually transmitted illnesses (STI's). Thus for women with multiple partners, it is advisable to use a method that will protect from STI's such as condoms.
5. **Effects of the method on the fertility**– some methods will need for a woman to wait for some time after withdrawal before fertility can resume. For example implants can take up to two years before a woman can fall pregnant.

### Contraceptives during breast feeding

Breast feeding is in itself considered a form of contraceptive. However this is only effective if the woman is exclusively breast feeding and that her menstruation has not resumed. The most advisable form of contraceptive to use during this time other than withdrawal method is progesterone-only pill and IUD's.

### Morning after/ emergency pill

As the name suggests this pill should be used only when a woman has had unprotected sex during the fertile days of the month. It should not be taken for more than once in one month otherwise it will interfere with the reproductive system.

## Fertility Boosters in Women

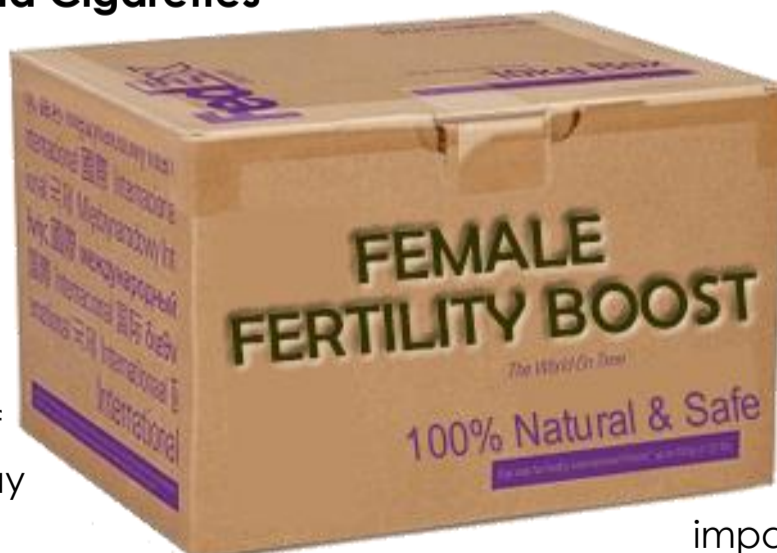
If fertility is a problem fertility boosters can help.

### 1. Eat regular healthy meals

Eating a healthy balanced diet is important to help in regulation of hormone levels. Particularly food rich in folic acid/vitamin C and vitamin E are fertility enhancers, as well as food containing antioxidants and certain minerals such as selenium. Besides, foods rich in Omega 3 fatty acids, such as fish promote fertility, since essential fats are required for hormone balance and healthy cell function.

### 2. Avoid Caffeine, Alcohol and Cigarettes

Fertility reduces in women who consume more caffeine. Though studies suggest that healthy, it's advisable to avoid consumption of less than 300mg is of getting pregnant. Alcohol reduces chances



Smoking reduces fertility and birth to term. Smoking damages falling pregnant during any particular cycle, and smokers may reach menopause several years before the normal age. It also impairs hormonal levels which affect fertility. The problem with smoking does not end when one gets pregnant. Smokers are highly probable to suffer miscarriage and difficulties during their pregnancies and also bear babies that are underweight.

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### 3. Excessive Weight and Underweight

Overweight can inhibit ovulation and cause trouble with hormones, besides putting women at risk of diabetes, blood pressure and heart disease which negatively impact fertility and can lead to complications during pregnancy. Fat cells cause hormonal imbalance. They produce extra estrogens. Hence being overweight is similar to being on contraceptives.

Consequently, being underweight can affect fertility. Underweight women have problems with ovulation like irregular menstruation.

### 4. Exercise

Physical exercises daily can help improve fertility as they help in regulating hormonal levels, reduce obesity

incidences, heart disease, diabetes which inhibit fertility.

### 5. Have Adequate Sleep

According to studies, body's level of hormone leptin, associated with fertility in women which is reduced in sleep deprived women.

### 6. Avoid Stress

Stress leads to depression, which impairs normal mental function, hence hormonal balances. Besides, when one experiences difficulties getting pregnant, they become distressed, lose appetite and engage in unhealthy lifestyles which may cause more problems with fertility. It is therefore advisable to relax and look for a way to avoid or reduce stress when preparing to be pregnant.

## IVF



IVF (In vitro fertilization) is a medical process by which fertilization is achieved outside the human body.

It involves obtaining an ovum from a female and fusing it with a sperm in the test tube. The zygote obtained after fertilization is then implanted into the uterus of the same mother or another mother to successfully achieve pregnancy.

IVF is used when other methods have failed to achieve pregnancy and eventually give birth.

In order to acquire the ova, ovulation has to be induced by use of fertility drugs. The ova can then be monitored through trans-vaginal ultrasound and retraction of eggs is by follicular aspiration.

### Types of IVF

1. Natural Cycle IVF- In this type of IVF, there is no induction of ova production by the ovaries. The eggs used in IVF are obtained from normal cycle without stimulation by drugs or any other means.
2. Low Stimulation IVF- This is another form of IVF in which hormones that induce fertility are stimulated for a short time. This reduces chances of hyper-production of eggs.
3. Donor eggs IVF- This is a form of IVF in which the recipient gets an ovum from a relatively younger donor. Getting a more viable ovum from a younger donor guarantees more chances of successful pregnancy
4. Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI) IVF- This is a form of IVF used when the proposed male experiences oligospermia. This means the sperm count is too low and chances of in vitro fertilization are minimal. The sperm is therefore injected directly into the ovum to maximize chances of fertilization.

Cost implications play a major role in deciding whether to undertake IVF treatment or not.



# MEN'S HEALTH

## Prostate Cancer and Sexual Activity

**Prostate Cancer is the most common cancer affecting men.**

**Factors affecting the risk of prostate cancer include;**

1. Age – risk rises as you get older and most cases are diagnosed in men over 50 years of age.
2. Ethnic group – prostate cancer is more common among men of African-Caribbean and African descent.
3. Family history – having a brother or father who developed prostate cancer under the age of 60 seems to increase the risk of you developing it.
4. Obesity – recent research suggests that there may be a link between obesity and prostate cancer.
5. Exercise – men who regularly exercise have also been found to be at lower risk.
6. Diet – research is ongoing into the links between diet and prostate cancer. There is evidence that a diet high in calcium is linked to an increased risk of developing prostate cancer.
7. Inflammation – Infections and inflammation can increase risk
8. Smoking

### **9. Sexual Activity**

Some researchers speculate that men who have sex more often may be more likely to acquire a sexually transmitted disease, which may infect the prostate, cause inflammation and other damage, and increase the risk of prostate cancer.

Another thought is that men who have sex more often have a higher sex drive, because of a higher level of male hormones-which, in turn, may increase the risk of prostate cancer.

But other researchers believe that sexual activity may actually decrease the risk of prostate cancer-that regular ejaculation, if you will, "cleans house" in the prostate, making it a less welcome

harbor for cancer-causing agents, infection, and stagnant materials that could lead to inflammation.

As part of a massive study, led by epidemiologist Michael Leitzmann at Harvard, they recently studied nearly 30,000 men participating in the Health Professionals Follow-up Study.

The conclusion is that men should not be worried that frequent ejaculation will cause prostate cancer. The frequent of ejaculation seems to have this protective effect however inflammation and STI is a risk factor for Prostate cancer.

A good dose of sex post 50 years will decrease the risk of developing prostate cancer so not having enough sex would increase risk of prostate cancer later in life.



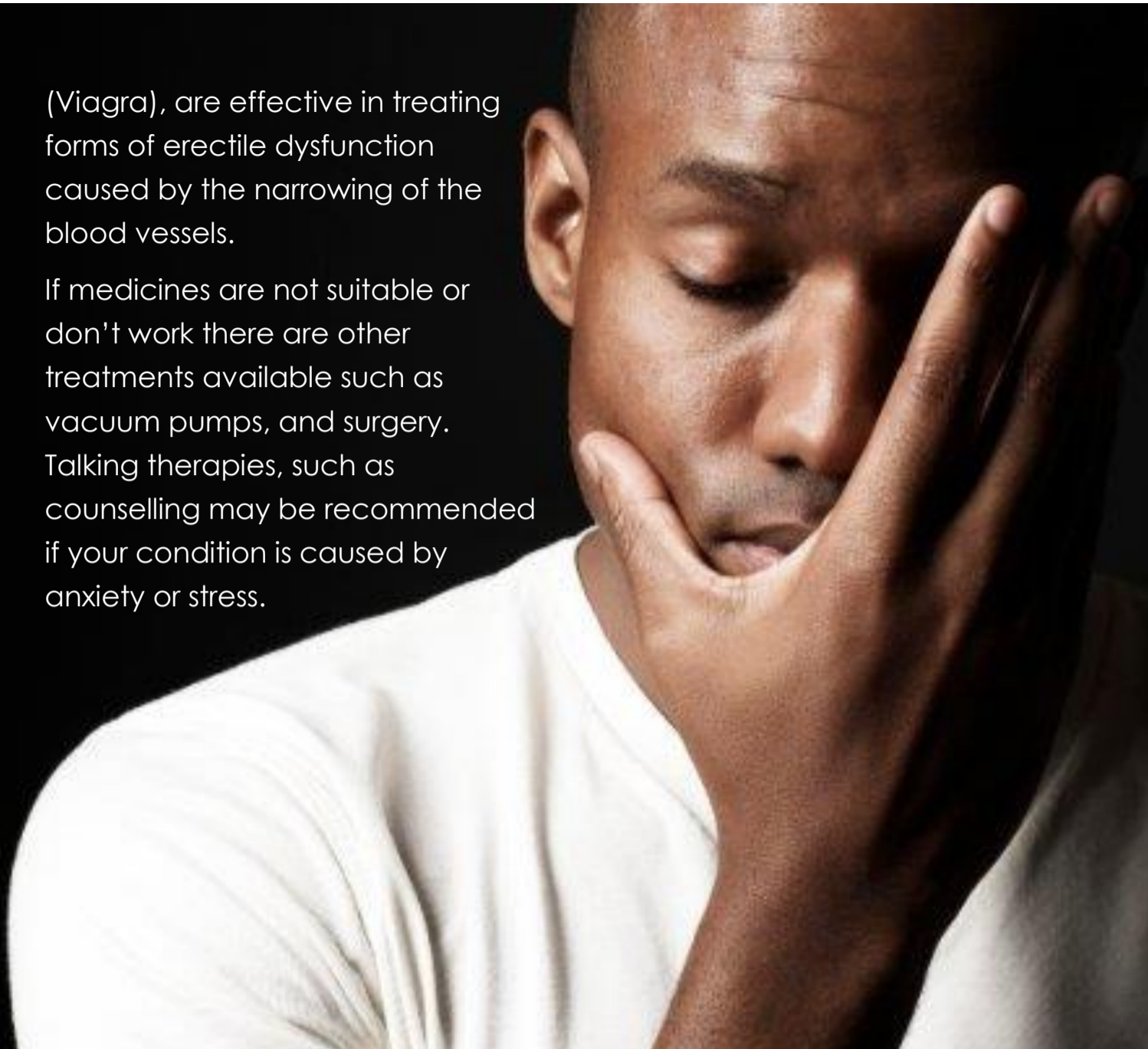
## Erectile Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction, or ED, is the inability to achieve or sustain an erection suitable for sexual intercourse. Causes include medications, chronic illnesses like hypertension & diabetes, poor blood flow to the penis (Priapism), drinking too much alcohol, being too tired or stressed, psychological problems, medications and surgery affective the blood vessels & nerves that supply your penis.

There are several treatments for erectile dysfunction. Sometimes, lifestyle changes such as reducing how much alcohol you drink can help. Your doctor will also advise you to lose excess weight, stop smoking and increase your physical activity. Medicines that you take orally, such as sildenafil

(Viagra), are effective in treating forms of erectile dysfunction caused by the narrowing of the blood vessels.

If medicines are not suitable or don't work there are other treatments available such as vacuum pumps, and surgery. Talking therapies, such as counselling may be recommended if your condition is caused by anxiety or stress.



Your doctor advice the most suitable treatment options for you. As erectile dysfunction can often be a sign of cardiovascular disease, your doctor may suggest you have some tests for risk factors. These may include checking your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose (sugar) levels.

## Nutrition and Male Libido

**H**ave you lost interest your sex life? Do you just spend most of your precious bedroom time watching prime time news or sports during weekends? Well, its time you start being conscious about what you eat and how it affects your sex drive.

Sound nutrition may help restore decreased libido as well as maintain an already existing one. Below are various nutrients which can enhance libido in men by helping their bodies produce necessary sex hormones, increase blood flow to the brain, boost energy as well as aid in dealing with the effects of stress.

1. Vitamins-1B-complex vitamins (B1, B2, B3, and B6) are important for hormonal balance and good pituitary function as well as dilation of blood vessels.
2. Biotin (Vitamin B7) increases male sex drive. They can be obtained from raw nuts, whole grains and asparagus.
3. Vitamin C which is associated with proper functioning of the sexual organ. It also boosts sperm function. Vitamin C is in plenty in fruits. For instance, the bromelain, a vital form of vitamin C found in bananas is believed to boost libido and may be a great relief for impotent men.
4. Vitamin A nurtures your adrenal glands which increases sex appetite. Vitamin A is present in carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli and spinach. Asparagus vegetable can assist the body in producing testosterone (male sexual hormone).
5. Vitamin E increases Excitement; it aids in the production of sex hormone and enhances blood circulation. One should however be careful about taking huge amounts because it can lead to increased blood pressure. Vitamin E is naturally found in nuts, beans, grains, seeds, fruits and vegetables.

6. Zinc a mineral found in lean meat is important in the production of testosterone as well as increase sperm count.
7. Selenium (important mineral) plays a significant role in promoting sex urge in men besides increasing male potency. It is found in whole grains, red meat, tuna and chicken.
8. Garlic for instance increases blood flow to the penile which is an important element of sex mood. If you are irritated by the smell of Garlic, you may take capsules of odorless or aged garlic.
9. Regular coffee takers are most likely to describe themselves more sexually active than non coffee takers. Caffeine reduces the probability of erection failure. At times, caffeine may wake you up if you feel lethargic. Nevertheless, too much caffeine can reverse the effect as it can make a person too hyper to focus or feel turned on.
10. Chocolate impacts the nervous system as it contains phenylethylamine, a chemical which gives you that romantic sensation of being in love, hence craving for sex.
11. Celery (an edible root vegetable) contains androsterone that increase your own libido.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections in Men

Some signs and symptoms of STI in men include;

- An unusual discharge from your penis
- Pain or a burning feeling when you pass urine
- Pain in your testicles
- Itching around your penis, anus or the surrounding area
- A rash, sore, lump or blister on or around your genitals or anus

If you have any of the above symptoms you need to see a doctor

## How to examine your Testicles

It's a good idea to check your testicles when you are relaxed.

Get used to the weight of your testicles by holding your scrotum with your hands. One testicle often hangs lower than the other, so you don't need to be concerned about this. Your testicles should feel smooth and you can roll them between your fingers and thumb. At the top and back of each testicle is a small tube called the epididymis. This feels like a soft coiled tube and is normal. You should also be able to feel the smooth, firm cord-like tube of the spermatic cord that runs up from the epididymis.

As a guide, you should visit your doctor if you notice:

- lumps or swelling
- pain or discomfort
- a testicle that feels hard
- heaviness in your scrotum
- aching in your abdomen, scrotum or groin
- anything else that you think is unusual

It's important to get to know what is normal for you and how each testicle feels. If you need more information, see your GP

