What is it?

The vaginal microbiome is the community of trillions of microbes (bacteria, fungi, viruses) that live in the vagina. The make-up of the microbes in the vagina can influence gynecological health outcomes for women and their birth outcomes.

“Healthy” Vaginal Microbes

Some microbes, such as *Lactobacillus*, are considered healthy for the vagina. They produce lactic acid, which make the vaginal environment more acidic and protect against disease-causing microbes. A lack of *Lactobacilli* causes an unhealthy imbalance in the vaginal microbiome, which is linked with bacterial vaginosis and preterm birth. Bacterial vaginosis can leave a woman more susceptible to sexually transmitted infections. The healthy vagina has a scent. However, when other microbes outnumber the *Lactobacilli*, the normal scent changes to a foul, unnatural odor. Listed below are some tips to prevent an imbalance of your vaginal microbiome. Talk with your healthcare provider for more information.

Healthy Vaginal Hygiene Habits

1. **Cleansing**
   - The vagina is a self-cleansing organ. Avoid douching or inserting any cleaning products into it.

2. **Condoms**
   - Semen alters the pH of the vagina which can increase the risk of bacterial vaginosis. Use condoms to decrease this risk.

3. **Avoid Scented Products**
   - The bacteria that protect the vagina from infections can be harmed by the harsh chemicals in these products.

4. **Breathe**
   - Let your vagina breathe by wearing cotton-lined underwear and not wearing tight clothing.

Additional Resources:

- Why your vaginal microbiome (like your gut) is important:

- The Superhero in the Vagina

- Don’t douche, and other lessons about the vaginal microbiome:

- A Gynecologist Guide to Good Vulva and Vagina Health

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