Is it a problem if my vagina is purple? [1]

Dear Alice,

Whenever I have my annual exams, my gyno tells me that my vagina is pink and healthy. Well I was curious lately and looked with a mirror and noticed that my vagina (inner labia and opening) is purple colored. Does this mean I am unhealthy? I haven't worn any dark clothing that would dye my skin. What could be the cause of this discoloration?

Answer

Dear Reader,

A woman's vulva is the outer part of a woman's genitals that can be seen. The labia majora and labia minora, the outer and inner "lips," join at and cover the clitoris, which is a woman's "hot button" located above the vaginal opening and below the pubic bone and mons.

The first explanation is that what you are experiencing is normal. When a woman is sexually aroused, the first thing a body does is increase blood flow to the genitals. In a woman, the increased blood flow causes not only lubrication, the first sign that a woman is aroused, but also a swelling and deepening of color to her clitoris and inner lips. Colors change from pinks to reds, and from reds to wine or burgundy. (Similarly, the male erection is the result of increased blood flow to the penis.) After a woman orgasms, or when she is no longer aroused, her regular color returns, since flow of blood leaves the vulva and returns to the rest of the body.

A chronic purple color could be caused by a yeast infection or chronic irritation of the vulva, known as Lichen Simplex. A yeast infection frequently changes the vulva from a pale pink to a red, although not necessarily purple. You can check out What is bacterial vaginosis? [2] to see if any signs or symptoms related to a vaginal yeast infection are present. Lichen Simplex is a dermatologic condition when the vulvar skin is sensitive and irritated over a period of weeks or months. Along with a change to dusky red or purple-looking vulva, signs and symptoms of Lichen Simplex include:

- Mild to severe itching and/or burning of the vulva
- Swelling and/or thickened areas of skin
- Skin tears caused by scratching
- Raw and/or damp feeling
Irritants that sometimes lead to Lichen Simplex include detergents, soaps, lotions, deodorant tampons/pads, douches, colored and perfumed toilet paper, and certain contraceptives and synthetic fabrics. If a woman's body is sensitive to these products, chronic irritation could develop. In general, bumps, redness, rashes, itching, lumps, and lesions on the vulva, accompanied by reddish or purplish skin, are usually the result of skin irritation, infection, or are caused by environmental factors. In rare cases, a color change of the vulva could indicate a more serious disease.

It is likely that this is a misunderstanding. Your gyno could be describing your inner vagina, your vaginal barrel, or even your cervix, as healthy and pink. You cannot see all of those inside secrets, so what you see is likely your own natural color.

Since it appears that you have no other symptoms, you can either wait until your next gyno appointment, or schedule one now if you need reassurance. You can ask her/him to clarify what s/he sees and what s/he says. You can also ask your gyno to show you what s/he sees by holding a mirror for you. This may seem weird, but it is reassuring and empowering, and may be just the information that you need.

Alice!

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