



THE

# WORD

**WELCOME TO THE BRAVE  
NEW WORLD OF VR**

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CHRIS HEAS/STUNK ARCHIVE

IF WE WORKED IN SILICON VALLEY OR WERE PART OF THE GAMING COMMUNITY, WE WOULD BE REFERENCING “VIRTUAL REALITY,” BUT BECAUSE WE’RE BEAUTY-OBSESSED, “VR” MEANS ONE THING: VAGINAL REJUVENATION. “FOR A LONG TIME, THE FOCUS HAS BEEN ON MEN’S SEXUAL HEALTH, BUT PEOPLE ARE NOW PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT CAN BE DONE FOR WOMEN,” SAYS NEW YORK PLASTIC SURGEON B. AVIVA PREMINGER, MD. “THE CONVERSATION IS FINALLY CHANGING.”

**T**he term vaginal rejuvenation has been called into question by some doctors who suggest it only encompasses aesthetic procedures, but we spoke to many experts who disagree. “Women come to us with functional and medical issues such as laxity, dryness, lack of sensation or inability to climax, and stress urinary incontinence (SUI), and our arsenal of tools can help correct them,” says Cindy Barshop, founder of VSpot, a female wellness spa in New York, which she runs with her business partner and obgyn Carolyn DeLucia, MD. “Whether we’re treating the area internally or externally, we’re rejuvenating it in some way to help improve a woman’s life and self-esteem.”

In order to understand the need for VR devices and how they work, there are a few anatomical facts to consider:

Although the two often get conflated, the vagina is the interior path that connects to the cervix, and all of the external parts are known as the vulva. Inside the vagina, there are three key layers of tissue: mucosa, smooth muscle and fibrous tissue, which is where collagen and elastin live. “The mucosa is the layer on the surface that can be touched. It has a similar texture to the lining of the mouth, and it heals just as fast, too,” says Dr. Preminger. “As we age and our estrogen levels drop, particularly during menopause, this tissue can experience atrophy and a decline in moisture, which can cause it to become very irritated and painful, especially during sex.” The most recent U.S. Census revealed that nearly 50 percent of post-menopausal women experience these symptoms.

Another common concern is a decrease in vaginal muscle tone, which can occur as the result of childbirth, the normal aging process and menopause. “Reduced collagen and elastin lead to lax vaginal tissue that can cause a lack of sensation

during sex, an inability to orgasm and urinary leakage, which is when a little bit of urine seeps out during actions like coughing, sneezing or running,” says Dr. DeLucia. “Urinary incontinence alone affects millions of women, but no one really talks about it.”

#### ENERGY HEALING

Over the last decade, scientific breakthroughs have given rise to a menu of options designed to treat—and in some cases, prevent—these issues. The two main categories of VR devices, lasers and radio frequency (RF), are based on nonsurgical technologies that have been proven to tighten and resurface skin on the face and body. Duxbury, MA plastic surgeon Christine Hamori, MD says that although the majority of doctors still consider the VR space new and long-term clinical studies on many of these treatments are still underway, peer-reviewed data published in the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* suggests promising results. (Note: This data does not apply to the new crop of at-home laser

## POWER PLAY

“Just like how a facial uses LED red light therapy to stimulate blood flow for healthy, glowing skin, the same can be done down there in a sense with a new at-home device called vFit,” says Barshop. The first intimate wellness tool of its kind, the handheld device delivers a combination of heat, LED red light and sonic technology to the mucosa to increase circulation, which helps keep the tissue healthy while also promoting natural lubrication. Barshop suggests starting with a six-minute session and working up to 10 minutes, depending on personal preference. There is not yet valid data proving the device’s efficacy, but Barshop says that after a couple months of using it every other day, patients tell her sex is more comfortable and pleasurable. “It’s particularly beneficial for post-partum and menopausal women who have experienced changes such as vaginal dryness, and it gives them a serious confidence boost.”



and RF devices, which make similar claims, but lack the requisite clinical evidence to back them up.)

When vaginal dryness is the issue, lasers such as diVa and MonaLisa Touch—the original VR device that launched stateside in 2014—employ either erbium:YAG, hybrid energy or fractional CO2 (different wavelengths of light) to help enhance lubrication in the vagina by reactivating collagen production in the tissue. Rochester, NY dermatologist Lesley C. Loss, MD uses the diVa laser at her practice, and says most patients describe the treatment as feeling like mild pressure and/or a dull, tapping sensation with little discomfort. “Three treatments spaced out over 12–18 weeks and one maintenance treatment each year afterward are generally recommended for the best possible results.”

For vaginal tightening, radio-frequency devices—popular options include the Viveve System, Votiva and ThermiVa—are the best bet. (Some can also be used to tighten the labia as well.) During a treatment, waves of RF energy heat the mucosa to between 104 and 116 degrees Fahrenheit, causing tissue contraction that produces a tightening effect. Some RF technologies offer the benefit

of rejuvenating the mucosa and building collagen, too. “The treatments feel like warmth and are comfortable for the patient,” Dr. Preminger says. The number of treatments needed is device-dependent—some only require one; others require two or three and then one treatment per year following to maintain the results.

The length of both laser and RF treatments also depends on the specific tool used, but typically ranges between five and 30 minutes, and there’s very little downtime. “Side effects include mild spotting, swelling and warmth in the area for up to 24 hours, and sexual intercourse and submersion in a tub should be avoided for about 48 hours,” says Dr. Loss. “Patients can return to exercise when they feel ready.”

Dr. Hamori says that data points to the improvement of urinary incontinence with both CO2 lasers and radio frequency. “However, RF is able to penetrate deeper than CO2, so it is thought that the supportive structures of the vagina may be targeted more easily with RF technologies,” she adds. Ultimately, a consultation with a qualified, board-certified dermatologist, plastic surgeon or gynecologist will determine the best approach for each patient.

#### WHEN TO GET SURGERY

“Some women are born with an abundance of labial tissue that causes chaffing and pain when they exercise or have sex, which can negatively impact their daily lives,” says Dr. Preminger, who often recommends labiaplasty—a surgical procedure that removes the excess tissue—in such cases. “I once operated on a ballerina who felt self-conscious every time she wore a leotard. After her surgery, she experienced a huge sense of relief and was incredibly happy with her results.” According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), the number of labiaplasties performed in the United States between 2012 and 2017 increased 217.3 percent, which is the largest increase of any plastic surgery procedure during that time frame. Dr. Hamori attributes the rise to the heightened awareness about the procedure brought on by social media. The surgery can be done under local anesthesia, but many doctors recommend general anesthesia so the patient feels more at ease. “It takes about an hour to perform, and although patients don’t typically complain of pain, there is some swelling during the few days following, so I recommend they stay off their feet as much as possible during that time,” says Dr. Hamori. “They can return to work on day four or five, resume exercise at three weeks and have sex at six weeks.”

#### NEXT-GEN KEGELS

Another method used to help control urinary incontinence (and also increase sexual satisfaction) is kegels—exercises that strengthen the pelvic floor muscles that support the bladder. Recommended by women’s health experts for more than 30 years, kegels are the contract-and-release motion we associate with stopping the flow of urine. “Exercising these muscles is very important for overall vaginal health,” says Dr. DeLucia. “We don’t want to reach the point where more adult diapers are being sold than baby ones.”

## SURE SHOT?

In 1970 when American feminist Anne Koedt broke societal barriers with her essay, *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*, there were hopes of more research to be conducted on the subject. But since then, only two nationally representative studies of sexual behavior have been performed in the United States, and they investigated both sexes. From those findings, one fundamental fact remains: Women don’t climax as often as men, particularly during intercourse. A study published in the January issue of the *Sex & Marital Therapy* journal showed the most common reasons for this, according to female participants, were stress and anxiety—reported by 58 percent—and lack of enough arousal or stimulation, noted by nearly 48 percent. When the latter occurs, there’s an injection that may help. Though the use of platelet-rich plasma (PRP) is not supported by the FDA, a PRP injection into the clitoris—it was aptly named the O-Shot by its inventor, Dr. Charles Runels—can purportedly plump up the area for increased sensation and intensity of orgasms. The PRP is made from the patient’s own blood—it’s drawn from the arm and then spun down in a centrifuge to release the portion that contains growth factors, which generates new tissue where it’s administered. Dr. Hamori says the treatment is not painful but requires a topical anesthetic, and results can last up to six months. The jury is still out on the effectiveness of the shot, but doctors speculate that it offers the same benefits it has demonstrated on arthritic joints and thinning hair. There’s a G-shot, too, which is an injection of hyaluronic acid filler, off-label, into the G-spot to help expand its size and amplify sensation during sex. However, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology does not endorse it as effective or safe, despite the opinions of doctors who offer the treatment.

CATHERINE SERVEL/TRUNK ARCHIVE



#### CHIC SUDS

Developed by doctors and dermatologically tested, **DeoDoc Daily Intimate Wash** puts a pretty, pampered spin on feminine hygiene.

#### V VIP

A little bit of **The Perfect V VV Cream** helps keep bikini bumps at bay between shaving, waxing and laser treatments.

One issue with this is that it can be difficult to perform kegels the right way, which is why so many blogs and books have been written on the subject and an assembly of at-home and in-office devices have been developed. The need for effective solutions has escalated so much that there's even a new kegel chair called Emsella, which Barshop offers at VSpot and says is the most efficient way to perform kegels consistently. "It stimulates the entire pelvic floor region using high-intensity focused electromagnetic (HIFEM) energy—it delivers a pulsating sensation of sorts as it contracts the muscles, but it doesn't hurt," Dr. DeLucia says. "It allows our patients to do 11,200 perfect kegel exercises, which is impossible for them to accomplish on their own and would take about 69 hours." The chair is comfortable, in a \$125,000 clinical way, and patients can stay fully clothed during each 28-minute treatment (six are suggested)—Barshop's clients often watch episodes of *Friends* on a TV in the room during sessions.

When doing kegels at home, biofeedback devices such as Elvie Trainer and PeriCoach offer a high-tech way to track them in real time via Bluetooth technology. "They're small devices that somewhat resemble sex toys, and once inserted into the vagina, they analyze each kegel and send the data to a corresponding app," Barshop says. "The apps also provide users with quick pelvic floor exercise routines to do each day, and then monitors their progress."

#### SKIN SENSE

The skin down there changes and ages over time similarly to the skin on the rest of the body. Although pop-culture moments like Amber Rose's #bringbackthebush post on

Instagram prompted many of us to embrace a more natural look, European Wax Center says its most popular service is still the Brazilian. That's one reason why brands such as The Perfect V, DeoDoc and European Wax Center have created skin care lines for the area. Avonda Urben, founder of The Perfect V, says, "When most or all of the hair is removed via waxing, shaving or lasers, the skin is more exposed, but it doesn't usually get the treatment it needs to keep it soft, smooth, and free of redness and bumps. My products are meant to be used like a multistep skin care routine, just like how we take care of our faces."

Urben, who coined the term "Vanicare" in hopes of making below-the-belt topical products as accessible as getting a mani, says we deserve luxurious products for this area. From pH-balanced washes to exfoliators that reduce ingrown hairs, modern formulas are being made with V-friendly ingredients such as natural fruit and flower extracts, and without any of the potentially irritating ones like synthetic fragrances and sulfates that can disrupt the vagina's pH balance or dry out the skin. Many of these products also come with a stamp of approval from gynecologists.

High-end spas are embracing the new category, too—select Canyon Ranch and Four Seasons locations now carry The Perfect V products—and see it as an opportunity to elevate their waxing services. Some spas offer an actual Vanicare body treatment, which Urben created to not only cleanse, exfoliate and moisturize the bikini zone, but also the hips, inner thighs and lower stomach. "I'm not creating a new behavior—we've been grooming this area for years, but we just didn't have the products to do it the right way until now." **TM**



## DRAMATIC RESULTS

As women undergo childbirth and get older, they can experience a loss of strength in their vaginal tissue, which is mainly due to a loss of collagen or altered connective tissue. This can cause what is known as vaginal laxity, which can result in decreased sensation and pleasure with intercourse, as well as urinary incontinence. The Viveve System is designed to treat these issues and works via a small probe that's inserted into the vagina, which emits radio-frequency waves to heat the tissue and prompt the production of new collagen. This allows the vagina to regain its prior structure and function, and in turn, laxity is decreased, sensation is restored and urinary leakage is alleviated.

The difference between the Viveve System and other radio-frequency devices is that it uses cryogen-cooled monopolar radio frequency (CMRF) technology, which enables the device to produce significant, sustained collagen changes while the cooling component allows it to reach deeper layers of tissue for an extended period of time without causing damage or burns to the mucosa. The cooling feature also makes the procedure completely comfortable and virtually pain-free for the patient.

"The treatment only takes 30–45 minutes, so women can have it done on their lunch break and return to work with no limitations," says Valencia, CA obgyn Courtenay Poucher, MD. "Most women notice improvement within 30 days, but the body can take up to 90 days to achieve full results, which last a year or longer."

#### WHAT THE PATIENT SAYS:

"This treatment was so amazing and easy. I only needed one session, which was great to not have to go back and forth. What made me really happy was that it was painless and had no downtime. Right away I noticed I didn't have any leakage when I exercised. It was a win-win situation!"

The Viveve System is indicated for the treatment of vaginal laxity, sexual function or urinary incontinence in more than 60 countries, and use in general surgery for electrocoagulation and hemostasis in the United States.