

NATURE'S APHRODISIACS

FOODS TO GET YOU IN THE MOOD!

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Hotter sex in the bedroom certainly starts in the kitchen! What you eat can have a direct impact on the quality of your sex life, affecting your hormones, brain chemistry, energy and stress levels. Some foods are provocative in appearance, others have psychoactive properties and others can actually increase blood flow to the genitals.

What are aphrodisiacs?

The word aphrodisiac is derived from Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and refers to any substance or thing that may stimulate or intensify sexual desire. History is steeped in the reported use and benefits of particular aphrodisiac foods, many of which bear cross-cultural parallels and consistency over time.

An aphrodisiac triggers sexual arousal either psycho-physiologically (via visual, tactile, olfactory and aural stimulation), or internally (from biological factors – the chemical constituents in food).

With some foods, the extent of psychological versus biological influence is debatable and the lines blurred. Chocolate for example is an aphrodisiac by virtue of its romantic associations, melt-in-the-mouth texture and pleasurable tasty characteristics, yet it also contains specific chemical constituents that can trigger mental and physical responses conducive to arousal. The visual appearance of the asparagus and banana on the otherhand are tell-tale of their reputé as aphrodisiacs, but are there other factors involved here too?

On a biological level there are hundreds of active, potent phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables– a subclass of nutrients increasingly revealed to yield remarkable health benefits to the body and its functioning. The vast majority of these chemicals, around 90%, are still unidentified. It is possible future discoveries in this field will unveil aphrodisiac properties yet unknown in many foods long revered for their sexual prowess.

When it comes to sex, the relationship between body and mind is an intricate, interrelated affair. The depth and pleasure of our sexual experience is deeply connected to the nature and extent of mental and emotional engagement.

Enhancing psychological dynamics to entice and excite serves to enhance our physiological chemistry. Tastes, textures and smells of foods can also all be powerful catalysts in eliciting sexual response. As John Renner, founder of the Consumer Health Information Research Institute (CHIRI) points out, 'The mind is the most potent aphrodisiac there is'. Body-brain chemistry is a complex and subtle process far from quantifiable.

The Power of Scent

'Depending on where you are in your relationship you may want to use different food odors and tastes, since 90% of taste is smell, to get the different responses you're looking for,' says Alan R. Hirsch, MD, neurological director of the Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago.

In a study that looked at what scents stimulated sexual arousal, Hirsch found every food aroma they tested triggered a sexual response in men, and some foods had more dramatic effects than others. 'For example, cheese pizza increased penile blood flow by 5%, buttered popcorn by 9%, and lavender and pumpkin pie by 40%,' says Hirsch. In comparison, floral perfume only prompted a 3% increase in blood flow to the penis among men. 'Baked cinnamon buns had more effects than all the perfumes together,' says Hirsch (now you know ladies), and the runner up to the winning pumpkin pie and lavender was the smell of doughnuts and black licorice combined. Well who'd of thought it!

Among women, the smell of men's cologne actually lowered blood flow to the vagina – perhaps not surprising as cologne contains a host of unfriendly chemicals. The study also found that the scent of lavender and pumpkin pie was a powerful sexual stimulant for women, but the combination of Good and Plenty (licorice-flavored candy) and cucumber was the most potent sexual scent in increasing blood flow to the vaginal area.

Unlike with men, the study found that some food smells actually inhibited sexual desire in women, such as cherries and the odor of barbeque or roasting meat. So be warned, whilst stoking the fires of your barbee you may be having the opposite effect on the woman in your life. Interestingly enough, barbequing, flame-grilling and roasting meat creates carcinogenic heterocyclic amines (HCA's) - perhaps a women's response to this smell is an instinctive bio-protective one.

Ethical Aphrodisiacs

As you will discover, you don't need to eat vulgar foods or endangered species such as fresh snakes blood and rhinoceros horns to enhance your sexual appetite (it's a wonder these ever could!). Nor do you need psychoactive drugs or substances that will imbalance your mind-body chemistry.

What ever the trigger of excitation, be it psycho-physiological or internal/biological, there are many healthy foods that serve romantic and erotic purpose, used for centuries for their stimulating effects.

COMMON FOODS:

Aniseed

The use of aniseed as an aphrodisiac goes back to Greek and Roman times, where sucking on the seed was said to increase your desire. Aniseed houses estrogenic compounds (female hormones), which have been reported to induce similar effects to testosterone.

Asparagus

The erotic shape of this vegetable no doubt contributes to its aphrodisiac status. The Greeks believed it had arousing properties and the Vegetarian Society suggest 'eating asparagus for three days for the most powerful affect'. Beware though women, Quensal (1809) states that 'asparagus turn men on but women off. Its main action is diuretic; the stimulating effect on the male genitals is a consequence of this.'

Asparagus is also rich in potassium, phosphorus, calcium, and vitamin E that can aid in hormone production and boost energy levels.

Avocado

The Aztecs called the avocado tree Ahuacuatl meaning testicle tree. The ancients likened the fruit hanging in pairs on the tree to male testicles. The Spanish spread news of its stimulating powers on return to Europe and Catholic priests forbade their parishioners to eat them. Avocados are a smooth, unctuous fruit with a sexy consistency.

The avocado is also a supremely healthy superfood and contains the body's master antioxidant glutathione, as well as host of healthy carotenoids, heart-

friendly monounsaturated oil and superior amounts of fibre, potassium and B6, as explored in [Miracle Superfoods](#).

Banana

Their phallic shape aside, bananas have long been associated with erotic energy in the tantric tradition. Legend has it that the serpent that tempted Eve hid in a bunch of bananas.

Bananas are rich in potassium and B vitamins, both used for sex hormone production. Bananas can be an erotic dessert in a romantic meal – eat it seductively to let him know the pleasures that await him!

Basil

Basil is said to enhance the sex drive and boost fertility. It is also said to promote a general sense of well being and stimulate circulation. The scent of basil was reported to drive men wild – so much so that women would dust their breasts with dried powdered basil.

Cardamom

Cardamom is an aromatic spice, with flowery tones. Certain cultures deem it a powerful aphrodisiac and also claim that it is beneficial in treating impotence. It contains cineole oil, which can increase blood flow in areas where it is applied.

Cardomon oil is spicy, warm and stimulating. It is an uplifting scent that can relieve mental fatigue, as well as quiet the nerves and is said to promote feelings of love and desire for sex. Cardomon oil stimulates the appetite – obviously on more than one level.

Celery

Celery contains the male hormone androsterone that is said to stimulate sexual arousal in women. Androsterone is believed to be released after eating through perspiration and function as a pheromone that turns women on. The Swedish author C.E. Hagdahl in his *Cooking as Science and Art* (1879) says that 'Celery contributes to a stimulation of the digestion, but is also suspected to be somewhat sexually exciting or even straightforward arousing. These effects can be reduced by boiling. It is not a food for everybody'. The Romans

also favoured the abilities of this vegetable, dedicating celery to Pluto the 'god of sex'.

So, for the guys eating celery may well increase your attractor factor, and hey, if you don't get lucky at least you've eaten a high fibre low calorie food full of nutrients and enzymes. Sex aside, celery is a very healthy vegetable that can improve digestion. It is also known to reduce high blood pressure due to its active compounds pthalides that relax and dilate blood vessels and reduce stress hormones. In addition celery contains the anti-cancer compounds coumarins that prevent free radical damage and enhance the immune system and acetylenics that have been shown to arrest the growth of tumour cells.

Chilli

Chillis can fire you up in more ways than one. They contain the chemical capsaicin that can induce the release of endorphins to create a temporary high. Capsaicin also speeds up the metabolism and increases circulation, responses that are similar to those experienced when having sex. It ignites our internal engine and stimulates our energy for passion. Eating large quantities of capsaicin may also work as an irritant to the genitals and urinary tract that can feel similar to sexual excitement.

Chocolate

The undisputed king of aphrodisiacs, chocolate has been used to stoke the fires of passion all over the world. This erotic predisposition meant it was even banned in some monasteries in history gone by. Chocolate contains a host of active compounds including anandamide, the psychoactive feel-good chemical, and PEA (phenylethylamine), the 'love chemical' which releases dopamine in the pleasure-centres of the brain and peaks during orgasm. PEA is said to help induce feelings of excitement, attraction, and euphoria. Cacao also contains tryptophan, a key component of the neurotransmitter serotonin known to promote a sense of wellbeing and relaxation, and 'nature's Viagra' arginine, the amino acid that enhances arousal and sensation in men and women. Arginine is converted into nitric oxide in the body which increases blood flow and relaxes smooth muscle in the genitalia.

Chocolate also triggers the release of endorphins, the body's own endogenous opiates that induce emotional relief and reward.

A study presented at the European Society for Sexual Medicine in London (2004) found that 'women who have a daily intake of chocolate showed higher levels of desire than women who did not have this habit. Chocolate

can have a positive physiological impact on a woman's sexuality.' The author of the study, Dr. Andrea Salonia, believes women who have a low libido could become more amorous after eating chocolate.

Originating in the South American rain forests, the cacao bean has been revered by the Mayan civilisations and called the 'food of the gods'. It was even used by the Aztecs as a type of currency. Rumour has it that the highly sexed Aztec emperor Montezuma drank 50 goblets of chocolate a day to enhance his performance. The legendary Casanova was also, unsurprisingly, a chocolate fanatic.

Described by America's leading nutrition guru David Wolfe as 'the best kept secret in the entire history of food', these magical beans are also the highest antioxidant food on the planet, far greater than blueberries and spinach, super-high in magnesium (great for the heart and nervous system) and also contain the beautifying mineral sulphur, MAO enzyme inhibitors that have appetite suppressing effects and record quantities of magnesium, known for its relaxing, calming effect on the nervous system and its healthy-heart properties.

Discover more about the amazing power of chocolate in [Miracle Superfoods](#)

Note: These properties are highest in pure unrefined cacao that is leagues apart from commercial chocolate products and contains none of the detriments such as sugar, hydrogenated fats, milk, additives, agro-chemicals, hexane and solvents.

Fennel

Fennel's aphrodisiac traits have been upheld by research that has found it to increase the libido of both male and female rats. This is likely due to the hormone-like compounds it contains that mimic the female hormone estrogen. This estrogenic activity is why fennel has been used as a breast enlarger. For centuries fennel has also been used to promote milk flow in nursing mothers, though should not be used by pregnant women as it may cause miscarriage. Fennel is an excellent stomach and intestine remedy for the treatment of flatulence and colic conditions and stimulates digestion and appetite.

Figs

This sexy fruit has long been thought of as an arousing stimulant and an open fig is believed to emulate the female sex organs. A man breaking open and eating a fig in front of a woman is said to be an erotic act. Figs are steeped in

history and are one of the oldest recorded fruits. They are mentioned in the bible (Adam and Eve wore fig leaves to cover their private parts), are reported to be Cleopatra's favourite fruit and the ancient Greeks held them as sacred and associated them with love and fertility. Following on in some Southern European countries wedding guests would throw figs instead of rice at newly weds as a sign of fertility.

Figs are one of the 23 major superfoods explored in [Miracle Superfoods](#), exceptionally high in fibre, alkaline and jam-packed with nutrients.

Garlic

This hot, pungent herb is said to stir sexual desires and Roman priestesses of old claimed garlic could make 'women fall in love and men powerful'. It is certainly an immensely healthy food with many disease-protective qualities such as lowering cholesterol, aiding circulation and fighting bacteria, fungi and viruses. The problem with garlic is its potent aroma - if your partner loves it great, if not, it's a risky aphrodisiac.

Ginkgo Biloba

Ginkgo Biloba is one of the oldest surviving species on the planet dating back over 150 million years. It died out in Europe during the Ice Age yet survived in China, Japan and other areas of East Asia and has been used in Chinese medicine for 5,000 years. Ginkgo works on the circulation system and significantly increases blood flow to the brain, enhancing mental alertness and memory, lending it the term 'smart herb'. It has been used to treat depression, headaches, tinnitus, short term memory, as well as to inhibit blood clots, reduce high blood pressure and help with impotence, penile dysfunction and male infertility. Ginkgo improves blood flow to the extremities such as arms, legs and the genitals. As Watson and Hynes' report in *Love Potions: A Guide to Aphrodisiacs* (1993), 'Because it improves circulation, it can help in cases where a man has circulation-related difficulties in getting an erection.' Recent reports suggest that ginkgo may also be useful in reversing the impotence caused by drugs such as Prozac and other kinds of antidepressant medications.

Ginseng

Ginseng has been regarded as an invigorating and rejuvenating agent for centuries in the East and is a powerful hormonal stimulant that can increase

libido. Hong et al. (2002) in a study on patients suffering from erectile dysfunction concluded in the Journal of Urology that, 'the Mean International Index of Erectile Function scores were significantly higher in patients treated with Korean red ginseng than in those who received placebo.' The word ginseng means 'man root', and the plant's reputation as an aphrodisiac may in part come from its marked visual similarity to the human body. Ginseng is a stimulating herb that helps to enhance physical strength and vitality.

Honey

Sweet sticky honey is a great source of boron, a trace mineral that helps the body use and metabolise estrogen, the female sex hormone. Studies have shown that this mineral may also enhance testosterone levels in the blood, the hormone responsible for promoting sex drive and orgasm in both men and women. In addition, honey contains B vitamins needed for testosterone as well as other nutrients, enzymes and phytochemicals.

The Egyptians used honey medicinally for numerous conditions including impotence and sterility. In medieval times honey was fermented into an alcoholic drink called mead that was said to 'sweeten' the drinker and promote romance and sexual desire. In ancient Persia couples drank mead each day for a month after their wedding known as the 'honey month' – the origins of the modern day 'honey moon'.

Liquorice (licorice)

Licorice has been used in ancient China for its love and lust provoking properties. Research has revealed that the smell itself is particularly stimulating. Dr. Hirsch, the neurological director of the Smell and Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago, conducted a study to examine how different smells stimulated sexual arousal and found that black liquorice increased blood flow to the penis by 13 per cent. It's not just men that benefit however, in China it is reported to be particularly stimulating to women.

Mustard

Mustard is believed to have a powerful effect on the sexual glands and by stimulating these is believed to increase desire. A folk lore remedy for impotence in the Middle ages recommends rubbing the male member with mustard to increase blood flow to the area (ooh, sounds painful!).

Nutmeg

Nutmeg has been lauded as an aphrodisiac across numerous cultures and highly prized by Chinese women. Research supports this use as it has been observed to increase mating behaviours in mice. Large quantities of nutmeg can be psychoactive and produce hallucinogenic effects so don't go overboard.

Oysters

The age old favourite oysters are packed with vitamins and minerals (including high amounts of the sex mineral zinc important for male sex drive). Romans documented oysters as an aphrodisiac and in a satire by Juvenal, the lustful ways of women were described after their ingesting 'giant oysters'. Oysters by association are said to resemble the female genitals. Casanova reputedly consumed 50 raw oysters every morning to provide him with the energy he needed for the day.

Pine Nuts

Pine nuts have been touted since medieval times for their stimulating properties and have been used in love potions for centuries. The Araian scholar Galen recommended eating 100 pine nuts before bed and the Roman poet Ovid, in his work 'The Art of Love', pointed to 'the nuts that the sharp-leaved pine brings forth' as powerful aphrodisiacs. Pine nuts are high in zinc, a mineral that improves male potency and sensory and sexual functions as well as boosts the immune system.

Roses

Roses are synonymous with love and romance. The oil and petals (which are edible) have been used for centuries in love potions and amorous pursuits. You can also purchase beautiful scented rose water from Middle Eastern and Indian shops which can be used in sauces and salad dressings, or sprinkle rose petals straight onto salads starters or dessert. You can even use dried petals if its winter time and soak them before use to soften – they taste delicious!

Vanilla

Both the smell and taste of vanilla is believed to stimulate sexual desire and amorous states. According to the Australian Orchid Society, 'Old Totonac lore has it that Xanat, the young daughter of the Mexican fertility goddess, loved a Totonac youth. Unable to marry him due to her divine nature, she transformed herself into a plant that would provide pleasure and happiness.' – that plant being vanilla.

LESS COMMON FOODS:

Yohimbe

Yohimbe is derived from the bark of the yohimbé tree (*Corynanthe yohimbe*) found in central Africa, where it has been used for centuries in fertility rituals. Yohimbe helps to stimulate erection and enhance libido and physical energy in both men and women. In the Pro Health article *Better Sex Through Chemistry* (1998), John Morgenthaler states that 'Most of the current medical literature on yohimbe discusses the treatment of male impotence but an impressive body of anecdotal evidence surrounds the use of yohimbe for making good sex even better.'

Yohimbe can have side effects that can include anxiety, increased blood pressure, and heart palpitations. Dosage is important with this herb - a safe amount is 15-20 mg/ day but always follow label product instructions carefully as concentrations may differ. Yohimbe should be avoided by people with kidney or liver disease, high blood pressure or heart arrhythmias, those on MAO Inhibitors, other prescription drugs, or any medical condition without the prior consent of a physician.

Arginine

Arginine is an amino acid found in certain foods and also produced by the body from other amino acids. It plays a role in wound healing, circulation and

sexual function as well as working as an immune booster and growth hormone stimulant.

Its sexual benefits are due to its conversion in the body into nitric oxide (NO) that relaxes smooth muscle, regulates blood pressure and is a potent vasodilator (opening blood vessels). This ability to relax blood vessels increases blood flow to the genital region. When sexually stimulated our bodies release nitric oxide (NO) in our genitals which causes the penis to become erect and enhances sex organ sensation for both men and women. Insufficient production of nitric oxide results in a lack of sexual stimulation or arousal. Dr. Julian Whitaker writes in the Wellness Institute Guide To Nutrients (1998) that 'Some scientists studying these phenomena have concluded that up to 90% of all impotency can be reversed by NO (and by implication, the use of arginine).'

Arginine is a naturally occurring amino acid (found in foods such as pumpkin seeds and chocolate for example), and can also be taken in supplemented form (available from health food stores) as a sexual enhancer by consuming an hour before sexual activity as well as for particular health conditions. It is not for use by diabetics, borderline diabetics, pregnant or lactating women, cancer patients or those who have ocular or brain herpes.

Damiana

This herb from Mexico has been used by both men and women to enhance and regulate the production of sex hormones and is considered a potent aphrodisiac.

'Chemically this plant has been found to contain several alkaloids that directly stimulate the sex organs... Native Mexican women have long drunk an infusion of the herb a couple of hours before retiring to prime themselves for their men. It is reputed to induce erotic dreams when drunk at bedtime.'

- Love Potions: A Guide to Aphrodisiacs and Sexual Pleasures
By Cynthia Watson & Angela Hynes (1993)

Damiana leaves can be used for making tea or tincture, or you can purchase ready-prepared tinctures in health stores.

Muirapuama

Muirapuama (*Ptychopetalum olacoides*) is a Brazilian shrub that produces pungent flowers with a jasmine like fragrance. It has long been used in traditional South American medicine as an aphrodisiac and sexual tonic, as well as for nervous system disorders, baldness, impotency, gastrointestinal conditions, neuromuscular problems and rheumatism.

Human studies have supported the use of Mura puama for the treatment of erectile dysfunction and improving libido. One study on 262 male patients experiencing low libido and the inability to maintain an erection conducted at the Institute of Sexology in Paris, under the supervision of Dr. Jacques Waynberg, found that 51% reported a significant improvement from erectile dysfunction. For those patients suffering from a lack of sexual desire, 62% experienced, in the words of the researchers, a dynamic effect.

In a second study by Dr. Waynberg on 100 men suffering from impotence, loss of libido and sexual difficulties due to fatigue, or debility, 66% of the men reported a significant increase in frequency of intercourse. Stability of erection during intercourse was improved or restored in 55% of the patients. Of the 46 men experiencing low libido, 70% said the treatment increased their sexual desire.

Unlike the Yohimbe, Muira puama does not have any potential side effects

Pregnenolone (Mexican Yam)

Mexican Yam contains a high concentration of a substance called diosgenin from which pregnenolone is derived - the building block for all hormones. Progenenolone is produced by the adrenal glands and may be one of our most important hormones because it seems to have a balancing effect on the levels of other hormones, bringing them up or down as required. Pregnenolone, the levels of which drop dramatically in the body from the age of 30, is a direct precursor of progesterone, as well as DHEA (dubbed the 'fountain of youth hormone'). Research suggests that restoring pregnenolone levels may improve mood, energy, memory and sexual function.

The safety of this substance has been long established as it was once used for arthritis treatment in the 1940's in large doses with no apparent side effects.

Maca (Lepidium meyenii)

Maca is a cruciferous vegetable such as broccoli, cabbage and kale and is found in the Andes Mountains in Peru. Its root is used for enhanced sexual stimulation and pleasure by both men and women. It is reputed the best natural libido stimulator and has been nicknamed Peruvian Viagra and

Peruvian Ginseng. It is also reported to have been used by the Incan warriors before battle to increase strength and endurance.

Maca is high in essential fatty acids, minerals such as phosphorus, calcium, magnesium and zinc, vitamins B, C and E, phytosterols and other virtuous nutritional substances.

Studies on animals led by Dr. Qun Yi Zheng found that Maca improved libido and sexual performance quite dramatically and showed an increase in the frequency of sex.

As well as boosting libido, maca has been used to fight erectile dysfunction and impotency in men and works to regulate hormonal balance and increase testosterone levels. Maca also improves energy, strength and stamina and eases symptoms of male menopause. Older people who are using Maca say that they feel younger while taking it.

Maca is very effective at increasing sexual appetite in women too.

Horny Goat Weed

Legend has it that an ancient goat herder observed that whenever his goats ate this weed, their promiscuity increased, hence its name 'Horny Goat Weed'.

Horny Goat Weed is a pungent herb native to the Mediterranean and Asia. It has been used for over 200 years in Chinese medicine as an aphrodisiac, as well as for kidney, liver and joint disorders. Horny Goat Weed is reputed to have a significant impact on sexual performance, helping both men and women last longer before peaking to orgasm. Its greatest benefit is an ability to increase sensitivity of the sensory nerves, leading to heightened sensations during sex and orgasm.

Studies performed on Horny Goat Weed have observed in both men and women increased sexual desire and activity, improved sensitivity of sensory nerves, increased sperm production, slightly increased testosterone production as well as Help in treating kidney, joint, back, and liver disorders.

It is said to work by inhibiting the enzyme acetylcholinesterase (AChE) that leads to higher levels of key neurotransmitters associated with sexual arousal. Horny Goat Weed also increases testosterone production, the primary hormone responsible for sexual desire. It also contains a flavonoid called 'icarrin' which is thought to help with erectile function.

Disclaimer: These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, or prevent any disease.

Please consult a physician or medical practitioner before taking any dietary supplement, especially if pregnant or nursing.

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