



FOODS for love

Can "aphrodisiac" foods really electrify your sex life? Here's the verdict

OYSTERS

For centuries, oysters were reputedly a magical substance that boosted the libido.

Casanova, the legendary 18th century Italian lover, is said to have eaten 50 daily at breakfast before seducing his lovers, who reportedly numbered 122.

In 2005, a team of American and Italian researchers confirmed he may have been on the money. After analysing molluscs – including oysters – scientists found they contained rare amino acids that increase levels of sex hormones.

"Previously it was thought that just the high zinc content in oysters was the reason, but this makes sense," agrees naturopath Narelle Stegehuis from Mass Attack weight and hormone therapy centre in Melbourne.

"Oysters are an important part of the diet to anyone who may have sexual dysfunction," Narelle says.

CHOCOLATE

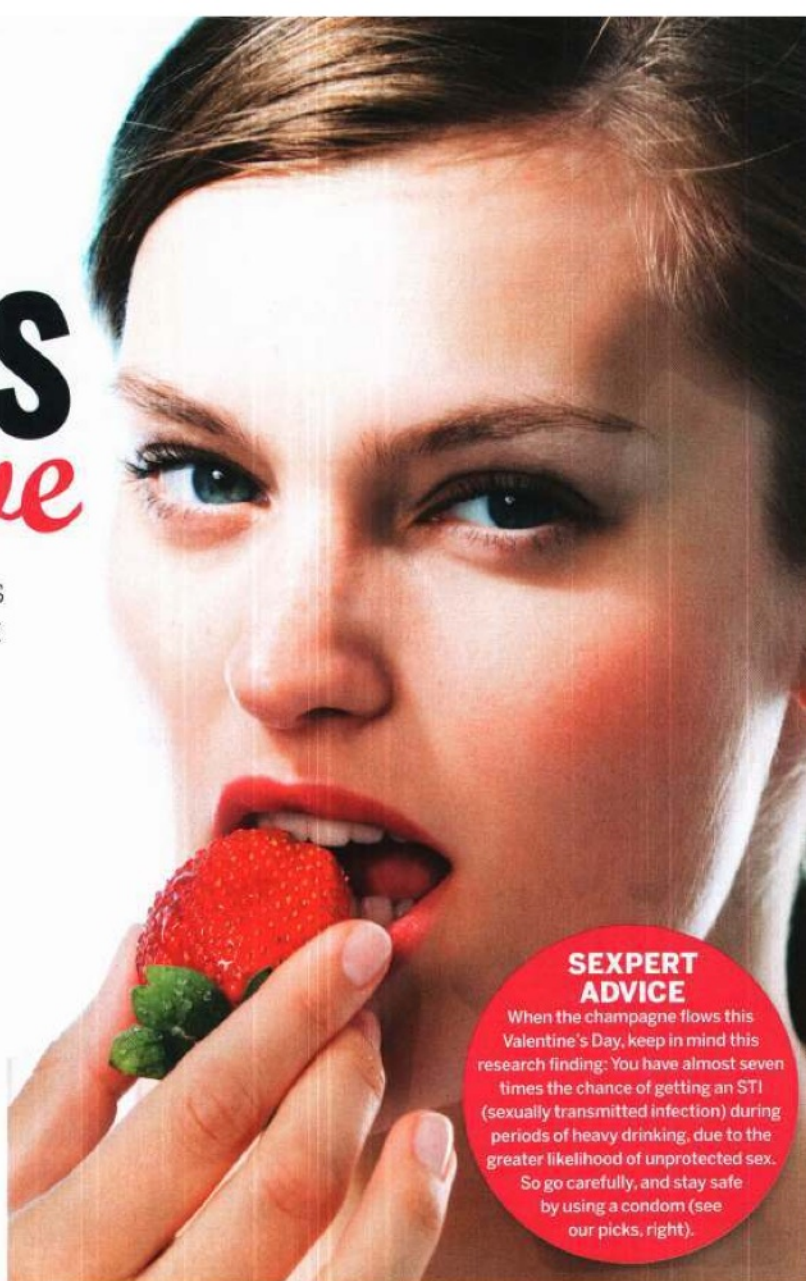
Apart from its sensual taste and texture, it contains a stimulant called phenylethylamine, considered the love or "wellbeing" chemical.

CHILLIES

"They raise our pulse, make us sweat and can trigger the release of endorphins that may be conducive to love-making," Narelle says. "They may also help blood circulation, bringing energy to the nether regions."

CHAMPAGNE

Viewed as the drink of love, champagne can create a warm glow, but go gently. "More than two glasses suppresses orgasm ability and also increases the risk of infection through unsafe sex," Narelle says.



SEXPERT ADVICE

When the champagne flows this Valentine's Day, keep in mind this research finding: You have almost seven times the chance of getting an STI (sexually transmitted infection) during periods of heavy drinking, due to the greater likelihood of unprotected sex.

So go carefully, and stay safe by using a condom (see our picks, right).

NATURE'S LITTLE HELPERS

Narelle names her top libido-boosting herbs

1 Damiana

This herb is reputed to help women with low oestrogen levels. "It's a gentle aphrodisiac herb – especially for women – that's great for sexual dysfunction, particularly if this is caused by vaginal dryness, or painful sex following menopause. If orgasm is the problem, damiana combined with ginkgo may help."

2 Ginseng

"Also great for vaginal dryness and lowered oestrogen levels or hormone imbalance (your doctor can test for these). It may also fix the 'too tired for sex' issue."

3 Tribulus

"This is widely used in natural medicine as an overall libido enhancer, and may be used for both sexes."

GREAT SEXPECTATIONS

If you need another reason to get between the sheets – or several hundred, in fact! – the *Archives Of Sexual Behaviour* has documented the top 237 official reasons we have sex.

Topping the list is “I was attracted”, “It feels good” and “I wanted to express my love”. But the following reasons also resonated with at least some of the 2000 people surveyed for the University of Texas, US, study.

- ♥ I wanted to feel closer to God
- ♥ The person was a good dancer
- ♥ I wanted to make up after having a fight
- ♥ It was easier to go all the way than to stop
- ♥ I wanted to burn calories
- ♥ I thought it would help me to fall asleep
- ♥ I wanted to get a promotion
- ♥ I wanted to get rid of a headache.

The depression link

While some foods may naturally lift our libido, they are usually not enough to help people who suffer from sexual dysfunction, such as impotence, or those who have a reduced libido as a result of antidepressant medication.

“The good news, though, is that usually your doctor can help by adjusting your dosage of antidepressants or switching to another medication,” says naturopath Narelle Stegehuis.

“For men with impotence, options such as Viagra or other sexual enhancement tools are available.

“Don’t suffer in silence. Talk out the issues with your partner and your health professional. In most cases, something can be done.”

If you or someone you know is suffering from depression, visit beyondblue.org.au or call Lifeline on 13 11 14.