Ingredients for Sexual Health

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A closer look at natural ingredients for sex health.

The impact of sex on human life is often not positive. Issues like lack of arousal and inability to procreate can turn sexual beings into sexual consumers. With so many natural ingredients purported to improve sex either directly or indirectly, let’s look at a few notable ones.

Cordyceps

There are many medicinal mushrooms on earth—but perhaps none so much like cordyceps (Cordyceps sinensis), which fruits from dead caterpillars. The lore that comes with cordyceps stretches as far back as ancient Chinese/Tibetan medicine¹ and as recently as 1993. When Chinese track athletes took six of nine possible medals at the World Championships in Stuttgart, Germany, their coach credited their success to an elixir containing the fungus.² Cordyceps’s nutritional benefit can be explained through the context of traditional Chinese medicine, as Mushroom Wisdom’s (East Rutherford, NJ) vice president of research and education Mark Kaylor...
explains to *Nutritional Outlook*. “Its ability to increase the Yang and nourish the Yin would explain much of the sexual health–related benefits of cordyceps. Its kidney Qi-strengthening could also account for some of these actions.”

Western medicine is now attempting to validate some of these points, including kidney function. Contemporary scientific research does support cordyceps for kidney health, and the fungus is already a common treatment for kidney failure. Kidney failure has been linked to potential for reduced sex drive, and since this organ is responsible for hormone production, cordyceps’s effect could translate into improvements in sexual health.

Growing science behind cordyceps and a potential for increasing oxygen capacity around exercise further serves the argument that cordyceps could support that other type of exercise. In 2010, a study on 20 adults found cordyceps to delay accumulation of lactic acid (a direct cause of muscle burning) during exercise. This study adds to what is already a wealth of animal and human studies confirming a recognizable benefit to exercise, yet still trying to explain the precise mechanism behind function. Some researchers speculate it could have something to do with cordyceps’s natural antioxidant content.

Other studies have explored theories like cordyceps for improving fertility in women, and promoting sexual function (by reducing erection and mounting latency)—and with early success. More research is warranted before we have any conclusive evidence.

According to Kaylor, double-blind, placebo-controlled human studies with men and women have also shown improvements relaying to hypo-sexuality issues.

**Maca**

Opposite the bug carcass–growing cordyceps is Peruvian maca (*Lepidium meyenii*), a turnip-like root harvested at upwards of 4000 meters in the Andes mountains. Legend has it that Incan warriors consumed maca before battle, but were prohibited from using it upon conquest of a city (to protect the women).

Maca root brings to the table unique compounds such as macaenes and macamides, along with other nutrients, including minerals and plant sterols, but researchers are still perplexed as to the exact mechanism behind maca’s proposed sex-boosting.

Research on maca supplementation for sex covers a number of areas, the most impressive of which has been its effect on sperm quantity. Studies confirm increased sperm quantity and/or volume in rats, healthy adult men, and even bulls, although the recommended dosage is still unclear. One 2003 study found sperm count was improved twice as long when supplementing with a lower dose than a higher dose in rats.

Other studies suggest maca could improve fertility and sexual arousal in rats. An improvement of libido is most often attributed to maca, namely because the root is characterized as an adaptogen, promoting restored energy balance in the body.

The libido effect has been demonstrated in several double-blind, placebo-controlled trials over the past decade. In one 2009 crossover pilot study, men performed cycling tests before and after supplementing with 2000 mg of maca or placebo. Self-reported libido improved following maca supplementation—an effect which did not transfer over to improved cycling performance (increased energy is rumored to be another benefit).

As for now, hard, conclusive evidence is lacking when it comes to maca actually making humans friskier in bed, but the science is young and growing. The outlook on maca improving sperm quantity appears most promising, albeit lacking in human trials.

As maca remains a competitive product in health food stores, research continues.

**Sexy Tidbits**

For a wider scope of the sex-health ingredients market, the journal *Food Research International* recently published a scientific review of ingredients commonly marketed in the category. Here are some of its findings:

**Horny goat weed** (*Epimedium*): Improved erection quality, increased sexual behavior, and relaxed smooth muscles (*in vitro*) in animal models.

**Ginseng** (*Panax ginseng*): Improved self-reported sexual enhancement and pleasure, improved erection quality in men, and relaxed smooth muscles (*in vitro*) in animal models.

**Yohimbine**: Improved erection quality in men and self-reported sexual enhancement and pleasure.

**Saffron**: Improved erection quality in men and self-reported sexual enhancement and pleasure, and increased sexual behavior in animals.
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*Note: Scientific results were compiled in light of a lack of human trials and lack of concrete knowledge regarding any potential side effects from consuming the above ingredients.


References:

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