Dear Alice,
Recently there have been creams for women sold over-the-counter to improve sexual enjoyment for women. Are these lotions safe for women and the men who love them, and do they work? I am familiar with a particular lotion called "Viacreme."

Answer

Dear Reader,

Most of the creams marketed to increase sexual pleasure for women contain the active ingredient l-arginine. This is an amino acid found in dairy products that increases blood flow to the genital area — specifically the clitoris. Since the clitoris is a bundle of nerve endings, more blood supply often translates into increased sensation. Viacreme is the brand name of one kind of orgasm enhancing cream for women that also contains menthol, which is supposed to aid in the absorption of l-arginine. When rubbed on to the clitoris, menthol also provides a tingle to the skin.

These orgasm-enhancing creams are available without a prescription on the Internet and at boutiques that sell sex toys and other pleasure related products. They typically cost between $10.00 - 20.00 U.S. dollars for a small vial containing three or four applications. The active ingredients in such creams have been widely used in other over-the-counter products and in higher doses (l-arginine is often sold as a dietary supplement, and menthol is commonly used in cough drops). No serious side effects have been reported from their use (among men and women); a small number of women have a "burning" sensation from the menthol, but some women describe it as intensifying the sensation.

Some women get significant pleasure from these creams, while others experience less of a sensation-boosting effect, or no effect at all. Still others use them a few times before feeling any difference, cultivating the sensations. There are a variety of other ways to increase female sexual pleasure including extended foreplay and using lubricants and/or sex toys during sex play. Check out the related Q&As below for more information. Another perspective, of course, is to value whatever pleasure one can feel. Orgasm is only part of the pleasure experience.

Alice!
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