

The Enemy Within

Ignored infections, repeated abortions, multiple sex partners and women's anatomical vulnerability are just some of factors contributing to an alarming incidence of reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs) and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), and of course; there is growing spectrum of AIDS.

How does the average woman react?

She feels alarm worries a bit but more often than not, there are so many reasons why she does nothing more about it .There is so much to worry about anyway: The children, their studies the Rat race at work, the never quite done chores at home, the endless rounds of parties and social events. The city women can well find reasons to push that out of sight infection out of mind. Beside the fact it affects her embarrassingly private areas: as of her anatomy makes it all more convenient to ignore it, cross her fingers and hope it will go away.

Maybe she will try an over the counter ointment or take a course of self prescribed antibiotics. But chances are; she won't see her gynaec unless the problem reaches a do or die situation.

The ruler woman has as many reasons for ignoring her very private problems. Her life is as busy as, her day as full the demands made on her time and energy leave her little time to worry about a niggling infection. Besides, admitting to a sexual problem brings forth suspicion about her chastity. Women were born to suffer women's problems anyway, and when one has lived with chronic lower backache, or gone burning is like a flea bite. Besides, even if she wished to turn to a doctor for help, she couldn't see a male with her yet that her health matters, too. In her list of priorities, after food and shelter, children and husbands and maybe in-laws, her health comes last.

NO MIRACLE CURES

Most STDs and RTIs are not treatable, but can be prevented. A little awareness, some health education and dose of caution in one's sex life can make a major difference in statistics.

Perhaps the first step towards cutting down on the woman's silent misery is health education at any early age. The most advanced school education often ignores this aspect; and entire generations of young people grow into the reproductive age group with little factual knowledge of how their bodies work, and the things that can go wrong.

Second, the importance of seeking out a doctor when something does go wrong whether it's an infection, a series of missed periods, or an unwanted pregnancy must be brought home to both mothers and their daughters.

Antibiotics and screening procedures can cure almost all infections if women will seek medical help.

The population pyramid as it is structured today shows that the base is made up of the under-teens, all of whom will grow to be sexually active teens and adults within the first few year of millennium. Unless they are granted access to health education that teaches them, among other things, the importance of personal hygiene and safe sex, the specter of STDs and HIV will continue to grow. Doctors across the country emphasize the need to set aside outdated taboos about discussing sex and importance of introducing health education at school level.

A change in gender balance will also help eradicate the silent enemy from the Indian women's life. Greater freedom between men and women in discussing contraceptive choices and the right to insist on a man using condom being granted by her partner to the woman, are other milestones woman from RTIs. And yet these basic avenues of mutual communication are not accessible to many urban educated women.

Also important is education about the correct use of sanitary napkins and tampons which more urban young women are adopting. Plus awareness that synthetic underwear, leotards and very tight jeans could give rise to conditions that make girls more susceptible to vaginal infections. Associability to better health services, especially in slum areas in the cities and in the villages can ensure safer Tran cervical procedures. Diagnostic and treatment options need to be improved; services need to be made accessible and acceptable. Most important the stigma

associated with seeking help for genital complaints should be done away with among the educated as well as the illiberal especially in the adolescent group. Also regular screening is a must to prevent cervical cancer. Through the city woman has access to screening facilities at affordable rates, it is amazing how many women avoid resources to this safe and inexpensive preventive measure.

This will come with an awareness of the fact that sexual and reproductive health is total well-being and a vital aspect of a woman's health.

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