



The Art of Vaginal & Perineal Steaming: A brief history and how to guide to safely, confidently and cheaply prepare a steam at home

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About the author and this work of love

Elizabeth is passionate about educating and inspiring women (and men) to live their most joyous, embodied and healthy lives. Elizabeth received her diploma in massage therapy after graduating from a US-accredited massage program of 545 hours in 2005. She has since taken many more courses of study in the wellness, healing and body work fields and has undertaken thousands of hours of hands-on body work, including studying cadavers. She has also completed doula and midwifery studies, becoming a certified Arvigo® practitioner in 2014, and an Embody Birth™ educator for the Maha AI Musa method, a somatic movement birth education program.

In 2015 Elizabeth studied pelvic floor restoration and pelvic energy medicine with Tami Lynn Kent. Currently, Elizabeth has a full-time Arvigo Therapy®, therapeutic massage, and wellness coaching program. She travels the world to teach and hold workshops on women's concerns and also brings awareness to greater world concerns. She believes the disregard of women is a symptom of the larger issue of global degradation and this is interconnected more intimately than we may realize. How we feel and treat our bodies and the bodies of others is often a reflection of how we feel inside too, regardless of gender.

Elizabeth first learned about vaginal steaming as part of her Arvigo® Therapy training but has since furthered her studies by her own efforts and personal experience in the field, following her passion. She hopes to make this art more accessible to all women and men. You can find out more about Elizabeth on one of her websites

www.BellyAndBodyCare.com or

www.SaveTheWombToSaveTheWorld.com.



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Have you heard of a facial steam?

Does that sound strange or weird to steam your face? A vaginal steam is just like a facial steam but for the pelvic region. Though most of us are more culturally accustomed to doing a facial steam.



Some benefits of a facial steam:

- Improves circulation.
- Slows aging.
- Encourages gentle detoxification.

The benefits of pelvic or vaginal steaming are much the same; and there are many more reasons for pelvic steaming covered in this ebook.

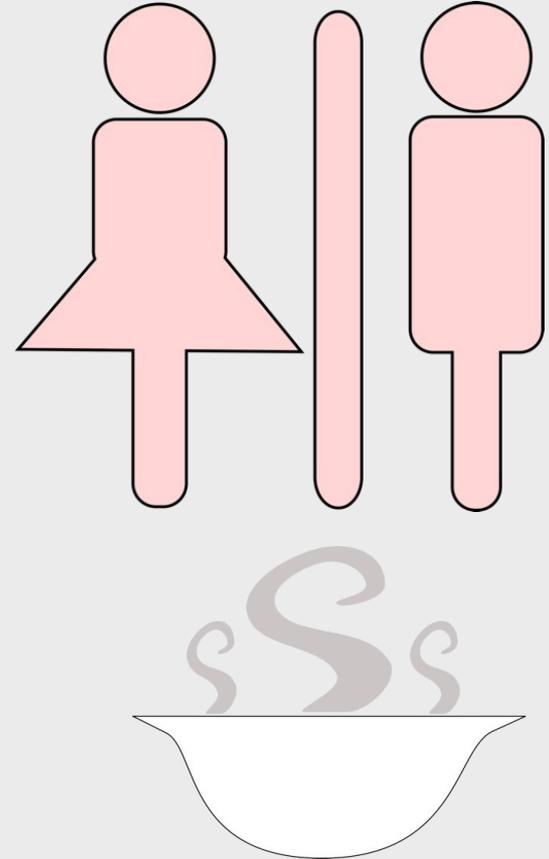
What exactly is pelvic or vaginal steaming?

Pelvic or vaginal steaming is a steaming process for the delicate outer tissues of the external pelvic floor region. In women this includes the vagina, anus, and perineum.

Did you know men can steam too?

Men only steam their anus and perineum. They pull everything else (the scrotum and penis) out of the way.

We'll cover more about chairs, safety and history as you keep reading. For both men and women steaming is external.



Why do a vaginal or pelvic steam?

- Curiosity.
- Infertility.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Hemorrhoids.
- Painful periods.
- Digestive issues.
- Post labor care.
- A need for centering.
- Gentle pelvic floor toning.
- Lubrication / re-moisturizing.
- Help prevent pelvic infections.
- Stress reduction and relaxation.
- After sexual trauma and abuse.
- After a miscarriage as an alternative to dilation and curettage (D&C).
- Uterine lavage - helps encourage the uterus to cleanse itself.
- Uterine prolapse prevention - for early home remedy use only. Not generally as effective with a severely prolapsed uterus (a uterus that is already at the labia or moving outside the body).



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Pelvic steaming is found all over the world

Sudan



The more I teach the more I see that steaming belongs to the world. It was secret, private women's business passed down orally from woman to woman through the generations. In this age of sharing and networking, the 'secrets' are coming to light.

Stories can be found of steaming in places such as Africa, Sudan, Vietnam, Thailand, all of Central and South America, the Caribbean, Korea. The Slavic nomadic tribes of Europe also practiced steaming.

Maya of Central & South America



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Korea



Image from Pixabay. Downloaded Feb. 15, 2018 by: Daebong

Nomadic Slavic tribes of Europe



Photo permission 2018 Sara Melchizedek. Family photo

The World...



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Pelvic steaming is an ancient healing art



Macchu Picchu

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Ixchel,
Mayan
goddess
of healing,
childbirth,
rainbows,
and rain

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ixchel_Dresden.jpg

We don't know how old pelvic steaming is or where it originated as very little was written down about it. As it was women's private business about women's private parts not much would have been recorded over the last several hundred years, especially with the more recent general domination of men and patriarchal systems. The Mayan people can be dated back as far as 2,600 BC and steaming is very much a part of their culture. Though steaming may not be this old it is certainly several hundred if not several thousands of years old.

There is even mother smoking or pelvic smoking

Pelvic smoking is generally done in regions with less water like Africa.

Essentially, pelvic smoking is the same as pelvic steaming. Usually special woods or herbs are prepared and dried in such a way that smoke can be used instead of water vapor. You can use any of the chair options covered in this book for pelvic smoking, even the toilet bowl.

For a toilet smoke use toilet moxa (yes it is literally called toilet moxa). Here is a link to toilet moxa:

<https://kineticdistributions.nz/products/toilet-moxa>

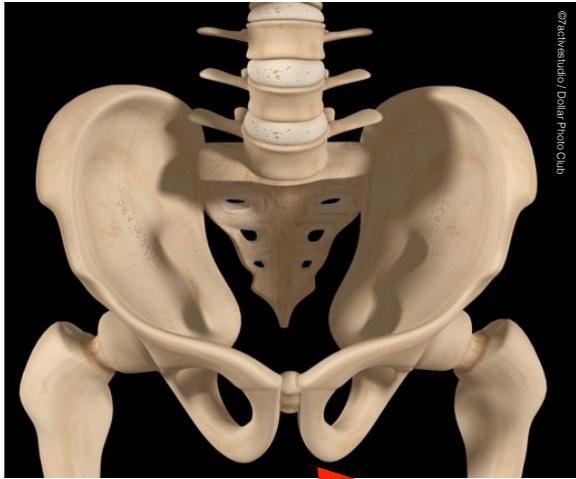


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Structural differences between male and female hip bones that matter in the realm of steaming



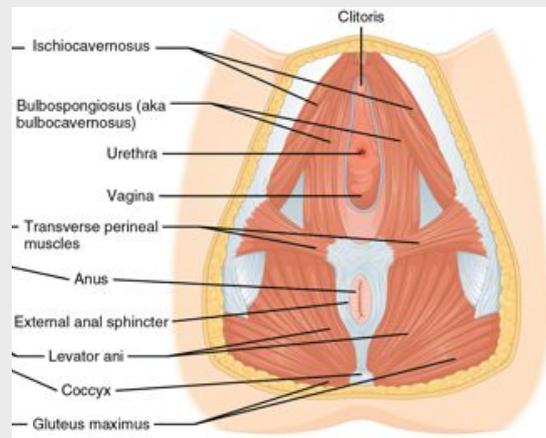
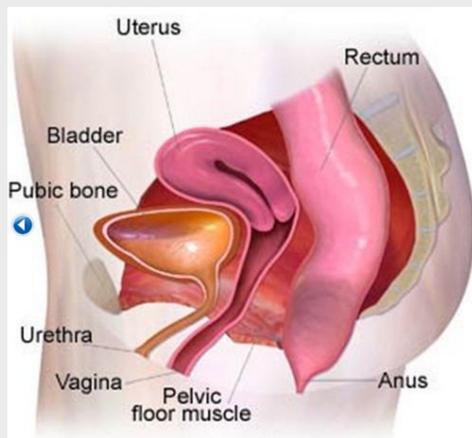
Male



Female

Notice that men have narrower hips and therefore a smaller pelvic floor in contrast to a woman. A woman has a larger pelvic outlet due to her ability to birth babies (if she chooses). Men have load-bearing hips so don't need the extra space. Structurally this means men and women have a different owner's manual for body care, just like different cars have different care manuals. Steaming can be an integral part of female pelvic floor care, or one tool that can help women tend to the needs of a hard-working pelvic floor. Partly due to this bigger pelvic outlet (exit), women are more prone to pelvic issues like prolapse, the falling down or sagging of body parts. This can include the pelvic floor and uterus.

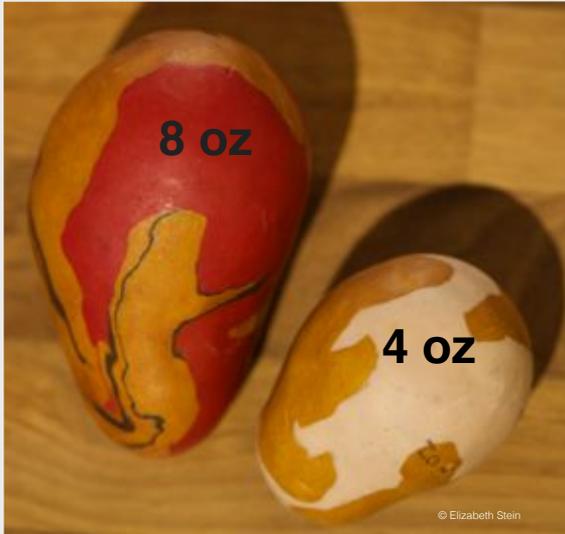
Basic pelvic anatomy and relevant organs affected by steaming



Stears are external and have a gently toning and relaxing effect on the pelvic floor muscles and nearby organs such as the uterus. Pelvic steams or “hip baths” as they are sometimes called in Asia, are an ancient beauty practice that women from Asian cultures believe helps women keep their youth and vitality; and certainly helps to retain lift in the pelvic area. Many older women, those past their child bearing years, will have their own steam or smoke chair in their house if they have the money, space and knowledge.

Steam acts on the uterus to encourage it to cleanse itself and shed any old, unshed lining. This is how steams can help with fertility and menstrual pain. Of course a woman experiencing issues like infertility and menstrual pain may also need to address other areas of her life like lifestyle, stress, diet and toxins, as steaming or smoking alone may not be enough; however, it can certainly assist with many pelvic problems.

A uterus doubles in size during the menstrual cycle



A lot of strain is put on the uterus with each menstrual cycle and especially with pregnancy. To the left are clay uterine models showing the doubling in size of the uterus during the menstrual cycle. The average size of the uterus of a woman of reproductive age is 4 oz. Before the menstrual period it will reach a size of about 8 oz.

There are 14 ligaments that secure the uterus inside the pelvic cavity. Steams encourage the uterus to stay up, especially as women age or go through childbirth. Steams can also be great for encouraging the uterus to stay in its ideal position sandwiched between the colon and bladder. Sometimes a uterus can wander though, due to it's unique anatomy and the 14 ligaments suspending it.

A steam encourages micro contractions in the pelvic space. Thus it can assist with keeping the uterus up, or encourage it back up, especially after labor in childbirth when mild prolapsing is common.

Note: Steams may not assist with a severely prolapsed uterus, one already at the labia, and will not help if the uterus is already outside of the body. Prevention is the best medicine in this case hence why pelvic steaming was valuable in many ancient cultures.

Safety precautions: Read and understand before proceeding

- NEVER USE ESSENTIAL OILS even if they are safe to ingest!
- Only use plants on the safe list unless you know your plants. (See list further on.)
- Do not do a steam if there is an active pelvic infection (bladder infection, thrush, herpes).
- Only plan a steam when you can stay home and/or relax afterwards.
- Be mindful not to steam too soon after childbirth. Work with someone knowledgeable about this if you are planning a post birth steam.
- Be mindful of physical gender when steaming. Men must take special precautions to safeguard their testicles and penis.
- Do not steam if you have any open wounds in the pelvic area or if you are already irritated.
- Be cautious of steaming if prone to heavy bleeding. A steam can cause more bleeding.
- Stay warm afterwards. No swimming or sitting on cold surfaces!
- Do not steam with plants you are allergic to.
- Only use organic or spray-free plants.
- Do not steam while menstruating.
- Do not steam when pregnant.
- If it's too cool, it's too cool!
- If it's too hot, it's too hot!

Note: Listen to the body and do not do anything that despite following these instructions still doesn't feel right or causes irritation.



There are many different kinds of steam stools

You can get very creative with your steam stools. There are many ways. Keep in mind comfort and safety. Remember we are dealing with hot water and potentially hot surfaces. Though you can squat, and some people do, I do not recommend squatting as it is really hard to relax. Part of the medicine in steaming is being able to relax. Below are some creative ideas.

- A clean toilet.
- Soft canvas camping chair that you cut to make a hole in the seat.
- Make your own seat. Many women make a wooden steam stool.
- Straddle a chair that has strong straight legs and back and has been laid on its side (see pg. 18).
- Buy a fancy electric steamer, like those used in Korean saunas, however, these are expensive.

Toilet Steam: Note, you'll need an additional medium-sized ceramic bowl



Canvas steam chair



Wooden steam seat



Sturdy straight-backed chair



The basics of what you will need to steam



- Floor covering to protect floor.
- Sheet - full or single sized will do.
- Some large towels (one or two should do).
- A pillow (optional).
- One pair of socks.
- One medium cooking pot with matching lid.
- Herbs, fresh or dried. (See list further on.)
- Steam chair. (I'll cover how to set one up later in this ebook.)

The steaming process takes about 1 to 1.5 hours (including set-up and take-down).

Photo credit: Clayton Hamilton. © Elizabeth Stein.

Basic instructions for stove-top preparation

- Gather about two handfuls of fresh herbs (about 1 cup) or about 1/4 to 1/2 cup dried herbs. (See list of herbs further on.)
- Put the herbs in a pot and add 1 quart (4 cups) water.
- Cover herbs with water and place lid on pot.
- Bring to the boil and keep at full boil for 2 or 3 minutes.
- Turn down heat to medium and simmer 10 minutes.
- Let cool for 10 minutes.
- Set up steam chair while herbs are cooling.
- Steam until the first hint of coolness. This will be about 10 to 20 minutes if set up correctly.

Note: Once the pot is no longer warm your steam is over and you must either stop or add more hot water to continue.

Image of herbs from my garden in my own steam.



Easy basic instructions for creating an affordable personal use home steam chair



This is a cloth camping chair that can be bought at either your local hardware or camping store. You might even find something suitable at a garage sale, or you might have one already. Three things to consider with a cloth camping chair:

- It is preferable this chair is for your own use only. The fabric material means sterilization is an issue. You will always use a towel covering around the hole that can be washed after each use.
- Do not cut the hole too big. The plate used as a circular key to trace around in these pictures is 16cm in diameter. A hole too big isn't comfortable on the pelvic floor and means the chair has less structural integrity. If the hole is too small not enough steam can get through.
- The camping chair you choose needs to have enough floor clearance for the pot and your pelvic area. You don't want anything too low. About 30 cm of clearance (more or less) is sufficient.

Side-lying chair steam 'stool'



1. Use a sturdy straight-backed dining room chair. Note: you will need one that has really solid legs not too far apart, and preferably one that lies flat when laid on it's back.
2. Lay chair down on its back.
3. Have pot with lid ready and sheets and towels nearby.
4. Set everything up. (See later instructions on set-up.)
5. Straddle the chair.
6. Wrap up.
7. Steam.

Toilet steam chair

So many people are averse to using a toilet to steam but they work really well. A toilet may be your most easily available steam chair option. I used a toilet steam for my first 1.5 years of steaming.

1. Clean the toilet well and warn any house mates you are going to steam.
2. Have a designated toilet steam bowl ready. Make sure it fits inside the toilet.
3. Prepare the herbs according to the stove-top instructions.
4. Transfer the herbs to the designated toilet steam bowl.
5. Sit on toilet like over a steam chair.
6. Only remain on toilet for as long as the herbs remain warm.



Cut a hole in a plastic or wooden chair - if you have the tools...

This is a steam chair for men only. Notice the small hole is towards the back of the chair.



This chair could just as easily have been made into a woman's steam chair by cutting a larger hole further towards the center of the seat. Note that any woman's steam chair can be easily converted to a man's chair by creating a towel shelf. Heat isn't good for a man's penis and testicles so these body parts need to be lifted away from the steam. Apart from this, steaming for men and women is essentially the same.

A note on temperature testing - very important!

Use a two-step process to test the temperature. It is very important not to burn this most delicate region!

Step 1: Test the temperature on your wrist by opening the lid of the stove-top pot just a fraction and feeling the steam. It's like testing a baby's milk bottle. Don't be too close in case the steam is still really hot. If the steam feels good on your wrist it will probably feel good on the pelvic floor.

Step 2: Once you are almost ready to commit to the steam process do a second test on your pelvic floor. Sit slightly leaning forward, ready to move if too hot, and then just barely open the lid and close it quickly to test the steam. If it's not too hot, then take the lid off and commit to sitting for the steam.



Test the steam on the wrist first.



Test the steam on the pelvic floor next.

Note: Always use caution when testing the temperature and be ready to move.

After the herbs have been boiled and cooled (a little), here are the basic set-up instructions for the steam chair

Due to hygiene concerns this type of steam chair is only for your own use.



Photo credits: Clayton Hamilton, © Elizabeth Stein



Photo credits: Clayton Hamilton, © Elizabeth Stein



Photo credits: Clayton Hamilton, © Elizabeth Stein

1. Towel hygiene cover. Usually two small towels is enough. Make sure the hole is not covered by the towels but no chair canvas is exposed where you sit. Place prepared steam pot under chair.

2. Remove your pants and underwear before starting. Sit on chair. Best to have on socks! Especially if cold. Have everything close by to grab easily or have someone help you.

3. Use sheets and towels to wrap all the way around, and make sure they go all the way to the floor too. Remember to wrap the back of the chair. The idea is to trap the steam. Pillow behind back is optional.

This is what you will look like steaming



Plants that are often considered safe for steaming

Remember don't use anything you have an allergy to and no essential oils!



- Basil
- Nettle*
- Pansy
- Thyme
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Motherwort
- Chamomile*
- Lemon balm
- Violet (leaf & flower)
- Plantain
- Bay leaf
- Damiana
- Horsetail
- Red clover
- Yellow dock
- Borage flower
- Calendula flower
- Dulse or kelp seaweed
- Marigold (edible only)
- Gingko (leaf only!)
- Citrus (any) leaf & flower
- Dandelion (whole plant is fine)
- Mexican wormseed (epazote)
- Lavender (leaf & flower)
- St John's wort (leaf & flower)
- Rose (fragrant varieties best)

Note*: Some people are allergic to nettle and chamomile. Don't use if allergic.

Special notes on plants



1. Be cautious of nettle and chamomile, especially if you are prone to hay fever.
2. Organic or spray-free IS important - the highly vascular pelvic floor will absorb the toxins sprayed on plants. This is true for female hygiene products as well. Be mindful and love your pelvic floor!
3. Do NOT USE any essential oils under any circumstances. It doesn't matter if it says safe to ingest or not. The pelvic floor has unique muscles, tissues and mucus membranes. Mucus membranes are easily burned by oils! Essential oils are TOO STRONG to use safely.
4. Stick to the list of safe plants unless you have herbal training. Here are a few rules for herbalists experimenting outside the parameters of what is considered 'generally safe'. Remember you take responsibility for your own health and well-being.
 1. Don't use cooling plants - like parsley, mint.
 2. Don't use drying herbs and plants - like sage or eucalyptus - or use them sparingly (one or two leaves is okay).
 3. Don't use anything too hot – like chilli peppers. I hope this goes without saying!

Herbal use for special conditions



For chronic infection: Oregano, thyme, rosemary, basil.

*Especially use oregano or elder flower for viral infections, like herpes.

For cleansing: Dandelion, yellow dock, yarrow, red clover, lemon leaves and flowers.

*Cleansing herbs can be helpful for addressing issues like endometriosis.

For healing and skin soothing: Calendula, comfrey, lavender, St John's wart, motherwort.

Never steam with open skin wounds on the pelvic floor or anywhere in the pelvic area.

For healing trauma: Using flowers is especially helpful, especially rose flowers and leaves (the more fragrant the better), basil, rosemary, bay leaf, and citrus leaves and flowers.

For Fibroids: Some women have had success encouraging fibroids to pass by steaming with dulse seaweed.

Notes: 1) Steaming with any of the recommended herbs with prayer and intention goes a long way to aiding one's own healing. The Mayan way was to ask permission of the plants and then thank the herbs. They believed that having gratitude was part of what gave the plants their healing powers, and they are not alone. The Māori of New Zealand have a similar belief, so try it and see for yourself.

2) It is also suggested that if there is an issue such as endometriosis, fibroids and/or prolapse it is also good to receive some kind of abdominal therapy from a qualified and well trained individual, in conjunction with pelvic steaming or pelvic smoking.

What to expect after steaming

- Sometimes there are cramps and twinges in the lower belly, especially right after a steam and for the next couple of hours. This is totally normal.
- More vivid and/or intense dreams, especially with a history of sexual abuse or trauma.*
- Nothing at all. Your steam maybe totally uneventful and this is fine too. Celebrate that you may not have so many issues in your pelvic space!
- More menstrual discharge and clots with the next cycle.
- A sense of lushness and warmth in the pelvic region.
- A greater sense of calm and relaxation.
- More vaginal discharge.
- You may be extra tired.
- Deeper sleep.

*Note: if you have a history of sexual abuse or relationship trauma, steaming could very well bring up things for you. The Maya prescribed steaming for women who needed to come back to themselves who may have gone through trauma or a really stressful period of life. My clients who have suffered sexual abuse often report nightmares after the first steam or two but not after that. If this happens, see it as a positive part of the healing process. Consider seeing a counselor or psychologist if you need more support. I feel this could be the case for men who have suffered trauma and/or sexual abuse as well, but as of yet there is not enough data from men to report on this.



The best time to steam and other common questions

When is the best time to steam?

- The best time to steam is any time you don't have your period. Many pelvic clinicians who work with steaming suggest the 10 days leading up to your period or the first few days after your period as ideal.
- If you suspect pregnancy you must wait until after a period or childbirth before steaming. This is very important.

When can I steam after a birth (vaginal and c-section)?

- If you are wanting to steam after a vaginal childbirth (no complications), generally it is considered safe to steam thirty days after the delivery. Your midwife, depending on her experience, may advise otherwise. Make sure there is no more heavy bleeding happening when you steam as this is one of the contra-indications as there is a risk of anemia.
- If you've had a c-section do not steam before 8 weeks and again make bleeding has stopped.

What do I use?

- Many people ask what to use. See what you have in your cupboards and garden. This is the traditional way. You can steam with only water and salt!
- Using spray-free or organic herbs is really important. You don't want to add more toxins!
- Plant a garden for steaming. Give the used steam water to your garden after it has cooled.

How to address recurrent pelvic infections such as thrush?

- Do not steam during an active infection as you could spread the infection around. Steaming will begin to improve the health of the area, and hopefully help prevent future infections especially if you are also seeing an abdominal therapist (Arvigo®, Mercier).
- Choose herbs that have anti-microbial properties like oregano, thyme, and citrus leaves. You can also choose soothing herbs like lavender and calendula to help with healing.

A quick comment on cyber trolls and other pelvic steam doubters



I've been steaming now for five years as of the writing of this ebook and I'll never go back to a world without pelvic steams. I love them and so does my body. So do many of my clients. Yes, it does sound a bit strange at first, but like most new things it soon becomes normal. If you find you have a strong negative reaction to the thought of pelvic steaming, this may have more to do with your own conditioning around this important body area. Remember acupuncture was discredited for many years even though in Asia it was accepted as standard medical practice for well over a 1,000 years. Steaming may have a similar slow acceptance but what I can say, it is here to stay. It never left us and now it is becoming more publicly accepted.

I'm aware there are bloggers, even other health professionals such as doctors, who advise against steaming. Keep in mind most have never experienced a steam themselves, so in my opinion, really can't speak so negatively about them. I've even written to a few and asked, "have you ever tried one?" Not one person has ever written me a response, at least since the writing of this ebook.

I have seen a few other negative reviews by someone who was burned in a sauna/spa experience. People, these are your private parts and your responsibility to look after. Speak up if things are too hot. Move if the spa caregiver won't do anything, or if you can't communicate with them as you don't speak the same language. There is no reason to get 'burned' out of 'politeness' ever!

Most importantly, steaming is great for self-care, for well living and aging gracefully

Many of us take such good care of our faces but don't give the same consideration to our pelvic floor. Next time you sit, walk, dance, or jump, think about how much your pelvic floor is doing for you to keep all your innards up and where they should be. If you've had children, give thanks and give some love back to this hard-working body area.

Steaming, it's good for you and I hope you join in the revolution of pelvic home care. May we all have excellent pelvic health no matter our age!



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2. If you like what you have read here please spread the message about the importance of pelvic care. Share the link to buy this ebook or other resources on social media if you like.
3. Get a private coaching or body corrective session. You can check out my website www.BellyAndBodyCare.com to find out more about my coaching and treatment sessions. I work with groups too.
4. And if you find yourself in Wellington, New Zealand, or Atlanta, Georgia, USA (where I go to visit my family about once / year) come get a hands-on session with me.



Cool pelvic floor love resources

How to make your own vaginal steam chair quickly and cheaply:

A short video detailing the short and easy chair making process.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnNjuLcT_w8&t=25s

For Pre-made vaginal steam herbal kits and other pelvic care tools,:

<http://laloba.ositracker.com/101038/8033>



Drion organic and biodegradable feminine hygiene pads (that really stay dry on):

<https://drion.nz/?ref=3&campaign=BellyCare>

Enter “BellyCare” at checkout and receive an additional 10% off online orders.

Drions are truly an amazing feminine hygiene product. Each regular size pad can absorb 150 ml of fluid and hold that fluid leaving a dry top layer, unlike most other pads that begin to feel damp with just a little bit of fluid build up, which actually isn't good for your health. These pads are free of chemicals, 95% organic and can be added to your compost bin. They have a turquoise strip in the middle made of crushed tourmaline (a semi-precious stone) that naturally emits negative ions and far-infrared energy to promote better pelvic circulation, which is great for even post-menopausal women (try the day liners). Negative ions help to naturally control microbial growth so smells and bacteria are minimized without the use of chemicals.

Thanks for reading
and enjoy your steams!



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