

(<http://bottomlinehealth.com/>)

# Easy, Soothing Treatment for Pelvic Pains — and Other Private Parts

**Published:** March 21, 2011   **Publication:**   **Source:** Laurie Steelsmith, ND   **Print:**



An unusual form of gynecological health treatment is “gathering steam” around the country — pelvic steam baths, also known by the catchier name, vaginal steam baths. Although this is a new idea to most of us here in the US, this traditional therapy has long been used in Korea (where it is called Chai-Yok) as well as in parts of South America (where it is called Bajos). While calling it a vaginal steam bath is definitely attention-getting, it is a misnomer, says Laurie Steelsmith, ND, a naturopathic physician and acupuncturist and author of *Natural Choices for Women’s Health* (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/140004796X/blpnrt>). It’s not the vagina, an internal structure, that is the focus but rather the outer genital area, the vulva. Furthermore, these so-called baths are not exclusively for women — men, too, can benefit from sitting over steam... for reasons I will explain.

IT HELPS LOTS OF PROBLEMS

Dr. Steelsmith is a fan of pelvic steam baths to bring relief for a number of troublesome complaints, among them to relieve chronic vulvar pain (vulvodynia or vulvar vestibulitis) ... muscle spasms (vaginismus) ... post-childbirth discomfort, including from episiotomy incision... or following a biopsy in the area. The baths soften and loosen the pelvic muscles, which helps make sex more comfortable for some women, including after childbirth. And there's more. Pelvic steam baths help with vaginitis and yeast infections and to heal trauma to the area. Now for you men — pelvic steam can help cure your groin fungal infections, better known as “jock itch.” And more importantly, they can soothe the perineal area after prostate surgery and reduce muscle spasms that might result from hemorrhoids or athletic strain or other injuries to the pelvic floor.

Dr. Steelsmith urges patients with any of these complaints to consider giving this therapy a try, describing the feeling it gives as “nourishing and cozy.” Some spas offer pricey pelvic steam baths, but you can do them easily at home, says Dr. Steelsmith. *Here's how...*

- Boil four cups of water. You can use the water plain, but many people like to add herbs or a little essential oil.
- If you want to use herbs, you should boil the water for 10 to 15 minutes with the herbs in it. (Use a covered pot to minimize evaporation.) Herbs that are popular for the baths include oregano and basil. For a combination that is both soothing and nourishing, Dr. Steelsmith says to mix equal parts of dried chamomile, calendula (marigold), lavender and red clover.
- If you prefer oil, add a few drops of a relatively gentle one (she suggests lavender, which is not likely to be irritating — or, if you have a yeast infection or jock itch, tea tree oil) to the water after it boils. Avoid harsh oils such as camphor or eucalyptus.
- Pour your brew into a stainless steel bowl, and place it under a slatted patio chair in which you can sit wearing no underwear and with your pelvic area exposed to the steam.
- A second option — empty most of the water out of a toilet by turning its water supply off and then flushing it. Then put the bowl of hot water in the toilet (make sure the rim of the bowl is above the level of any remaining toilet water) and sit on the toilet seat. This allows the pelvic muscles and floor to relax completely, says Dr. Steelsmith, which improves blood circulation and therefore healing. (*Note: Wrap your lower body in a towel to hold the vapors in and capture the steam more efficiently.*)
- Remain over the steam for 15 minutes, no more. Do this twice a day to treat infections or an episiotomy incision... for all other purposes, do once a day until the problem has resolved.

There's only one safety concern, but it is important (if a little obvious). Make sure you are not burning yourself — the temperature should be what you find comfortable, which typically will be reached 10 minutes or so after boiling.

---

**Source:** Laurie Steelsmith, ND, a naturopathic physician and acupuncturist based in Honolulu and author of *Natural Choices for Women's Health* (<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/140004796X/blpnrt>) (Three Rivers).