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SPEAK



MARCH - MAY 1987



St. Wendolins Women Working and Sharing Together

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LETTERS

Dear Friends

I would like to have SPEAK magazine I have read all about it in Learn and Teach Magazine. So as a married woman, I think the SPEAK magazine will give me purpose and direction of married life and its grievances.

Yours faithfully, Mrs Msibi
Tshiwelo

Dear friend, thank you for your letter. We hope that women will write to SPEAK to share their grievances and ideas for ways to solve them! - SPEAK Collective

Dear Friends

I greet you. I am fine where I am except for problems that I am facing at work. I have no day off at all. I do wish to go to the meetings like other people who are free on Thursdays, but I cannot. I have no bonus. All I get is a little bit of groceries which hardly satisfies my needs. Sometimes I work from sunrise till sunset without even a slice of bread to eat.

I often get asked to stay overnight and look after the house when my boss is not around. They do not pay me even a cent for doing that.

Please help me solve this. What does one do in such a situation?

Yours, Lucy
Durban

Dear Lucy, we are very sorry to hear about the problems facing you. There is a union for domestic workers (South African Domestic Workers' Union) that can help you solve your problems. The address is: SADWU Office 5, The Ecumenical Centre, 20 St Andrew's Street, Durban. The telephone number is 305 1322 or 305 1323 - SPEAK Collective

Dear SPEAK Collective

I am a shop steward in a union in Johannesburg. I sell SPEAK to workers. But you really got me in a tight corner with this issue number 12. Men were protesting about the coverage of periods. They said if you want to sell to them, please don't include such topics. So, in order to get sales from all sexes rather don't include such topics.

With regards, Male Shop Steward

Dear Brother, thank you for your letter. We are sorry that men in your factory were unhappy about the article on periods. SPEAK has these articles because women tell us that they find the information very useful. We would very much like to hear what other SPEAK readers feel about this. So please write in with your views! - SPEAK Collective

WORKING AND SHARING TOGETHER



St Wendolins is a place outside Marianhill in Natal. There is green grass, banana and mangoe trees around the houses. There are also old empty houses which must have looked good when there were people living in them. Some people left the area when the government threatened to uproot and remove the community.

SPEAK visited St Wendolins because we had heard that a group of women there were working together on vegetable gardens. It was a rainy day, but we managed to talk to some women as we ran from one garden to another between the showers of rain. Like in other parts of this country, women in St Wendolins have many problems. In the face of unemployment, low wages and high food prices they have to run homes and feed their families. Some of the women here decided to grow vegetables together. "Most of us are unemployed," one of the women in this group told us, "We are Roman Catholics and we decided to do this as church women. We plant our own vegetables to eat at home and to sell to get some money".

The women did not have any trouble getting land to start their gardens. There was vacant land owned by the Marianhill Institute. Luckily the women do not have to pay for using the land. There are about four gardens in different parts of St Wendolins. Each garden is divided into equal plots. Each plot is shared by 6 to 8 women. What has made the gardens work well is the spirit in which the women work. There is no competitive spirit. They share and work together. This means that they don't have to each buy their own seeds. "The idea of coming together like this",

they told us, "is that we share whatever we have. We do not each have to buy our own seeds. Each person grows what she has and give plants to others who need them. If one person has carrot plants that are ready from her seed bed, she makes everybody aware. So, if you are interested in planting carrots you can get plants from her without buying. We help each other a lot. We teach each other how to share."

They share the job of selling as well. "We also work on the basis of trusting each other", said one woman, " We know each other's plot. We know who has what vegetable ready. We do not all have to be in gardens to sell. We sell for each other". She explained this as she was pulling out weeds from between her plants. "We operate on good faith. If someone comes wanting to buy cabbage, I know who has it ready, then I sell it for her if she is not around. She will then get the money from me when we see each other."

They try to involve other women in the gardens. "It is not all the women in St Wendolins who are working in these gardens, but we encourage others to join us day by day. When we started these gardens, people thought that we were mad, because we had to start from nowhere. We had to plough on our own using hoes. Today they appreciate this and some of them have joined us."

Working together on the gardens has led to other things. "Coming together like this gives us a chance to share some of our problems as we water plants. We have also started sewing classes together," said the women. Another thing that has helped make the gardens a success is the support the

women get from the community. The women told us: "People from the community come and buy as individuals and they also buy in bulk if there are meetings which involve cooking." The gardens have made some difference to the lives of the women. "What I earn from selling vegetables and what I sew contributes towards school fees and buying my children clothes. My husband is very happy because we share the financial load," said one woman.

Coming together and supporting each other is not something new for people in St Wendolins. For many years the government wanted to uproot and remove the people of St Wendolins. The community fought against this and won.

The women who plant together in St Wendolins have found a way to share their hardships and work together to try to cope with their problems. This sharing has made their vegetable gardening possible. They have at least land to plant in. But in other areas where land is not available women do come together to sew or to make other things to sell.

People all over are struggling against unemployment, low wages and high food prices. But these problems will only be solved when we have a government that cares about the people in the country, and when we have a new system where all the people have an equal chance to a decent happy life. This struggle for a better system and a better government is being taken up by workers, women, community organisations and young people. Organising together and sharing together is part of building the future that we look forward to.

WE ARE NOT TOYS !!

SPEAK Collective talked with some women about a problem that women and girls have almost every day of our lives. The problem of being harassed and treated as toys by men. This article looks at a few women's experiences of "sexual harassment" and at what this means for us as women. We would like SPEAK readers to write to us and share what you think about this problem.

A woman was in the vegetable shop with her daughter. She was trying to get her daughter to go to the shop next door to buy milk. Her daughter was quietly saying, "No, please ma, I'm frightened to go". "Don't be silly," said her mother, and turning to the woman selling vegetables, she said, "She's afraid of the boys hanging around outside, they always pick on her." "These boys are terrible", said the woman, "They are always doing that. I scold them but they won't listen."

Another woman went for a job at a sweet factory and was told she would get the job if she agreed to sleep with the boss at



R15.00 a time. Woman at this factory complained that they get called 'bitch' and 'cow'. The boss told one woman "I like your big titties".

At a trade union rally a woman was seen running from a man who was trying to grab her. Other women at this rally had to deal with comments from men who were supposed to be comrades but who made unwelcome comments and passes at them.

All of us have had things like this happen to us. We see this every day, on the streets, on the buses, at work. Women are whistled at, sometimes grabbed, sometimes chased, sometimes raped - by men.

Why do young girls have to be afraid to go out, even in the very streets where they live and grow up? Why do women have to be insulted when they go to look for work, and when they try to earn a living? Why do we have to defend ourselves from men we work with, who are our comrades at meetings and rallies?

As young girls we learn early in life that we are not as free as the boys to walk on the streets, even during the day. We know that we must not walk alone at night. We learn that we must find ways to defend ourselves at work, on the bus, and in fact all the time. Because even when the army and cops, are not there we are picked on, handled by and under threat from men. Some of this might be done half in joke, the boys just having a good time - but for the girls and women it means something else. Women don't enjoy these things.

What it means for us is that we are not respected. We are being treated like toys to be played with.

This is one of the things that women go through that needs to be changed. Women must be able to walk in the streets. We should be able to go out at night without fear. We must be able to go to work, to meetings without being treated as toys.

Some trade unions have taken up problems of sexual harassment by bosses. But there is much that still needs to be done in trade unions, community and other organisations to make sure that something is done about this problem. This is a problem women face in all countries. In Britain there are organisations to help women who face sexual harassment at work, like Women Against Sexual Harassment (WASH).



Hundreds of women in Britain, Europe and Mauritius have marched the streets in protest against the harassment and violence women get from men. They call for women to "Take Back The Night" so that the world may be a place where women need not fear men.

A WORD OF ADVICE TO OUR FELLOW BROTHERS
AND SISTERS IN THE STRUGGLE



JOB'S FOR SEX

This is something being done in many factories by personnel officers and training officers to our sisters, girl-friends, and wives. Managements know about it, but they don't do anything about it since it does not affect them as much as it does us workers. We keep on complaining about it, but do nothing ourselves, since our very sisters are not willing to help us out. They are afraid of victimisation and scandals. But we can still do it on our own.

How do women get trapped? Usually women get employed at factories outside working hours, even weekends. During lunch times you can find the personnel's office locked. But after lunch you will see a lady coming out of the very office which was locked.

At DUNLOP we realised that the training officer sold jobs for sex. From there we planned to catch him in action with workers who could walk around the offices and watch him.

He employed one lady on a Friday, and by Tuesday the following week at about 13 hrs he called the lady to his office. One of our union members rushed to the door a few minutes later to test if the door was locked or not, and found it locked. He phoned another member, who phoned one of the managers.

The training officer was caught, and got fired on the spot. The woman did not get fired.

This was far better than allowing workers to assault him as they wished. We just refused, and promised them that we would solve the problem. And now they are all happy.

(Signed)

SHOP STEWARD AT DUNLOP

This letter shows one way that a union has taken up sexual harassment at work. It was written by Andries Raditsela who was a shop steward from Dunlop and a respected worker leader in the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union. He died in 1985 under 'mysterious circumstances' while being held in detention.



LOOK, LISTEN, WOMEN ARE IN STRUGGLE - INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IN CHILE

Last year women in Parque Forestal, Chile were sure about wanting to celebrate International Women's Day. They planned a peaceful march to the park where they would hold a rally. Well, the army and police didn't want this peaceful rally to go ahead. They used water cannons and tear gas to try and stop the women. The women broke up into smaller groups and moved around the town from street to street. So they were able to take over the town for three hours! Their cry was "No more because we are more!" A woman who was there on the day said:

"And we were more: enough to jam up the whole of the city centre, women together on every corner. There were women everywhere: old, young, rich, poor, from the shanty towns, from the unions, from the professional organisations, from every progressive political group. There was lots of singing. But mostly we shouted: 'He (the president of Chile) will fall, women give their word', and 'Look, listen, women are in struggle' and 'Democracy in Chile and in the home'. The women had their say on International Women's Day in Chile! The police had not been able to stop them.

WIFE-BATTERER BACK IN COURT

Dr Ashok Maharaj of Maritzburg must have got a big shock this year. He had been sentenced in court to a fine of R100 for beating his ex-wife. Then he decided to appeal against this sentence. When he did so in court the judge gave him an even harsher sentence! The judge increased the sentence to three months in prison suspended for five years. The judge warned that wife-batterers must not expect to get off lightly. Unfortunately most do.



OK WORKERS FIGHT FOR A LIVING WAGE

OK Bazaars and Hyperama workers are back at work after a 10 week long legal strike over wages. This was the longest strike ever in the retail trade. It was also the biggest strike outside of the mining industry. 1100 workers took part. Many of them are women. 137 stores around the country were affected by the strike. Workers were demanding a living wage. OK Bazaars bosses' profits grew last year but the workers' wages did not. Some workers earned as little as R232.00 a month. The average income of OK Bazaars directors is R11 542.00 a month. OK Bazaars is the largest company of its kind yet it pays the lowest wages of all other similar companies. The bosses were able to use the State of Emergency to try and disrupt the strike. Over 900 workers were held during the strike. Some are still being held in detention. 146 workers have been dismissed. The union is fighting for the release of detained workers, and for the reinstatement of dismissed workers.

Many people stopped buying from OK Bazaars. They didn't want to support a company that pays slave wages. Many different organisations came out in support of the OK workers. The bosses needed to settle with the union. The workers have won a R400.00 a month minimum wage, and a R100.00 increase which will be paid in instalments. Staff will get 12% staff discount. Workers in the bantustans and women on maternity leave will all get these increases. Despite these difficult times, the OK Bazaars workers showed their strength and determination to fight for a living wage.

**YESTERDAY
TODAY &
TOMORROW**

Release Political Prisoners



Thousands of people all over the country are in detention. The Detainees Support Committee believe that there are about 200 people in detention in Durban and they have the names of about 40 who are children. Among those in detention are members of NOW, including the chairperson, Nozizwe Madlala. We look forward to a time where detainees are freed and the struggle for justice is won.

BLACK WOMEN WRITERS

We have recently seen and read many books written by Black women from America. Women like Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Maya Angelou. Some of these books, like those of Zora Neale Hurston, were written a long time ago, but have been reprinted by Womens' Press and Virago Press recently.

Finding these books has been very exciting. For the first time we have the chance to see Black American women through their own eyes. Many of these books, like Maya Angelou's book 'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings', are about the very women who are writing. About how they grew up, about their sorrows about their joys. About their families, their communities and the times they live in. Alice Walker's book of short stories 'In Love and Trouble' looks at women in many different situations. There is a story about a woman who is desperate to find a doctor for her dying child. Another is about an old woman, who is mentally confused and enters a church not realising it is for Whites only.

These writings allow us to look into the lives of Black American women. We see in the things they write a little of our own lives. We see something of the lives of women we know. Some of the things they talk of women, all over the world go through. These stories show also that writing about our lives is an important way of sharing our tears, laughter and hope with other women. We hope that more women will write about their lives so that we can learn from each other.

If you are interested in finding out more about these books, please write to SPEAK. Here are some names of books by Black American women writers:

- * 'Horses Make a Landscape More Beautiful', a book of poems by Alice Walker
- * 'The Colour Purple' by Alice Walker
- * 'Dust on the Tracks' by Zora Neale Hurston
- * 'Brown Girl, Brownstones' by Paule Marshall

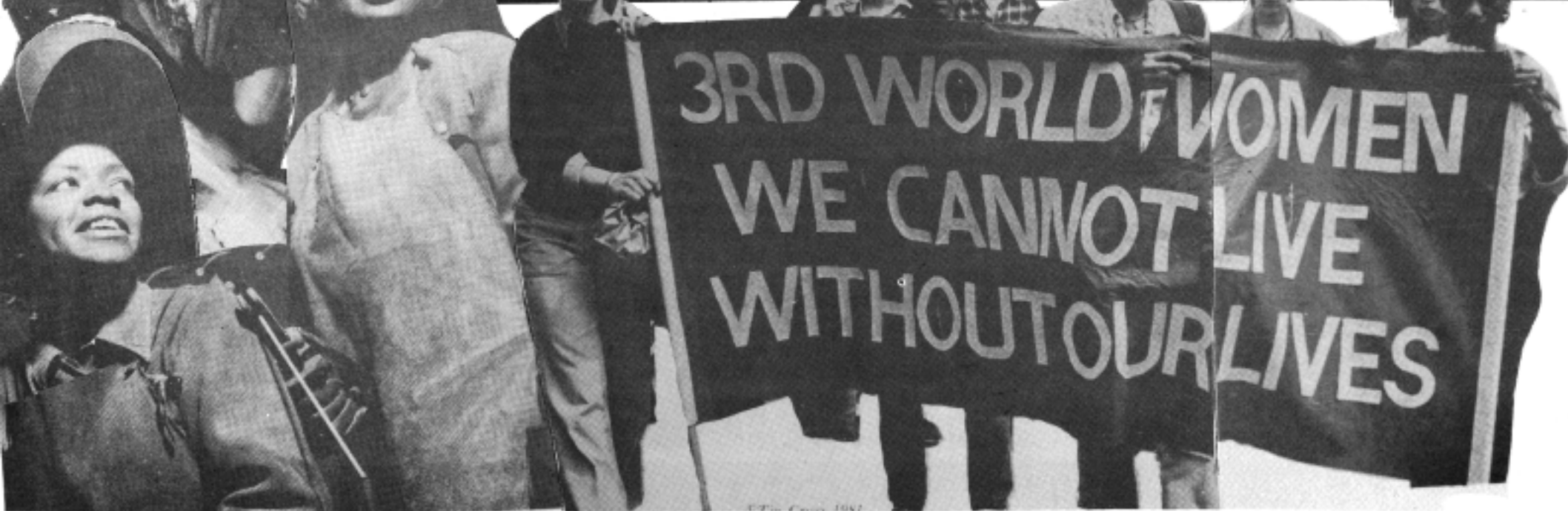
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Above - cover of Alice Walker's book.

Opposite - photos from book edited by Gloria T Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith - 'All the women are White, all the Blacks are men - BUT SOME OF US ARE BRAVE', published by The Feminist Press, New York.

Photo of five women rail workers from postcard by Helaine Victoria Press, U.S.A.





Photograph by Aron Meisel

Striking Clover workers are making their story known through a play. 168 Clover workers were fired 7 months ago after taking part in a 2 day work stoppage. They were protesting against the dismissal of 2 fellow workers. One of them is the chairperson of the shopstewards in Pietermaritzburg. Many people say that ever since workers were dismissed, Clover, NCD, SACCA and Elite products seem to taste bitter. Clover workers' support committees have been formed in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. If you want to know more about how you can support these workers, write to: Clover Workers' Relief Fund, c/o Food and Allied Workers' Union, P.O. Box 8131, Cumberwood, 3235.

I wanted to go out
and change the world
but I couldn't find
a baby-sitter

MARCH 8 - INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
March 8 is a day when women all over the world remember their common struggles, needs and hopes - and also learn from and support each other in their struggles. The very first International Women's Day was marked by a strike of women workers in Chicago, USA in 1909. Some years later women from many countries held an International conference to talk about what they could do to fight for women's rights. On this day we strengthen ourselves for our fight for jobs for all, for decent housing, lower food prices, and an end to unfair treatment of women. Women all over Durban will be celebrating International Women's Day - in church, and in cultural events with plays, poems, songs, dance and music.



"It's really challenging - we're learning to swim for the first time!" About 20 women from Ghandi Women's Circle in Phoenix meet each week to have swimming lessons. The life-saver at the pool teaches the women how to swim. It's a long way to walk to the pool, and down a steep hill, and so they each pay R1.00 for a taxi back afterwards. "We're in the home most of the time, and so getting out and doing something like this is really good," said a member of the group. "And it's a real thrill learning how to swim!"

RAPE CRISIS TRAINING COURSE
Rape Crisis is an organisation that helps people who have been raped. We also help women who have been beaten and hurt by their husbands or boyfriends.

Rape Crisis is running a course for women who want to become involved in the work of Rape Crisis. The course starts on Sunday March 15. It will be run over three full Sundays and six evenings. It finishes on Thursday 2 April. If you would like to know more about this course, phone Lifeline 232323 or Autopage 295123, in Durban.

Rape Crisis does many different kinds of things. These include:

- * helping rape survivors
- * giving talks to schools, groups and organisations
- * training women to become rape crisis counsellors
- * running self-defence courses



YESTERDAY TODAY &

TOMORROW

I WAS FORCED TO CHOOSE

This is the story of Mildred, who works for a big firm in Durban. SPEAK came to hear of her hard times when an organiser from the union she belongs to told us of her. We arranged to meet Mildred, who agreed to share her story.

I was employed by a big firm in May 1986. My work is to clean the offices and make tea. In September 1986 I felt sick. I went to the doctor. He said that I was pregnant, and that I had high blood pressure and so I needed rest for two weeks. He wrote a letter to the manager saying that I must be booked off. He wrote in the letter the reason why. When I came back from sick leave the boss was angry with me. He said that I must have been pregnant from the time I was employed. He said had he known this he would not have employed me. So he fired me.

Fortunately for me when I came to that firm my fellow workers advised me to join the union, which is the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA). So when I was fired I reported to one of the shop stewards who advised me to go straight to the union offices. I went there and the union took the matter up.



Meanwhile I stayed at home. I didn't stay long. It was only for one week and I was told to go back. Apparently the boss denied that I was fired. The union helped me to get my job back. I would advise other workers to be union members because without the union's help I would not have gone back to work.

When I came back my fellow worker had to go on leave and there was no-one to replace him. So I was forced to do his work on top of mine. I ended up cleaning more offices and making tea for more people. I really had to work myself flat out. I continued to feel sick. I went back to the doctor who told me that unless I rest there's a big chance that I'll lose my baby. I was seven months pregnant then.

I knew exactly what staying away from work meant - it meant losing my job. I had to choose between having my baby and



I really had to work myself flat out.

losing my job which was very difficult. I could not lose my job as I had just moved into a new house at Inanda New Town, after renting a room for years. I had my three children to care for. So I continued to work, just hoping that nothing would happen to my baby.

One Saturday afternoon I went off feeling very sick. At night I felt labour pains. Remember, I was still seven months pregnant. I was taken to the hospital. The following day I had a premature baby which died within a day. I felt awful. I knew I would not have lost my baby if I was not working so hard and if it had been possible for me to take the rest I needed to save my baby. I had to go back to work as soon as possible after losing my baby because I knew that I would not have any sympathy from the boss.

When this all happened to me I was very upset at the choice I was forced to make because the boss was so hard. I wish something could be done to make bosses see women as workers and as child-bearers. It is because of the way I was treated that I lost my baby.



I wish something could be done to make the bosses see women as workers and as child-bearers.



Drawings by Caroline Argent

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VAGINAL INFECTIONS

What are they all about?

Thandi was 6 months pregnant and sitting on a bench while waiting to see the doctor. Around her were many women. She heard them talking about this 'itch' that worries them so much. She'd never thought of telling anyone about hers! She felt very relieved to know that there were many other women suffering with it



like she does. It was only then that she felt brave enough to tell the doctor about it. The doctor told her that she had a vaginal infection and gave her special pills.

Ask any woman you know about vaginal infections and she will have her own story to tell. One woman said: "It drives me mad. I just want to scratch down there - but I can't in front of others. It's like torture - especially when I'm out somewhere." Another woman said: "Getting vaginal infections often happens to me. It makes me very depressed. I hate it."

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU HAVE A VAGINAL INFECTION?

Throughout the month we have some vaginal discharge inbetween periods. This comes from the vaginal walls and cervix. This fluid keeps the vagina wet. It also washes out the vagina and keeps it clean and healthy naturally. During our period cycle, the amount of discharge we have changes. Sometimes it is see-through and runny. Other times it is a milky colour and sticky. Some women have more discharge than others. You will know if you have a vaginal infection because the vaginal discharge which you normally have will change. It will increase and maybe change colour. It might smell bad and make you feel itchy and sore. There are many kinds of vaginal infections and most of these have difficult names. A very common one is called 'moniliasis.' We know it as 'thrush'.

SO WHAT ARE THESE VAGINAL INFECTIONS ALL ABOUT?

Vaginal infections are caused by germs. Colds and 'flu are also caused by germs. Many women get vaginal infections as often or more often than they get colds and 'flu!

There are germs in the air we breathe and in the water we drink. Our bodies are fighting sickness and infection all the time. When our bodies are healthy and strong we are good at fighting sickness. But when we have been working too hard, not getting enough sleep, and not eating the right food or enough food, our bodies become weak and unhealthy. It is at times like this that we are more likely to get infections. Just like every other part of our bodies, our vaginas need to be healthy to fight infection. A normal healthy vagina has slightly acid

fluid (like vinegar). This acid fluid usually stops germs from growing. If the acid fluid changes in some way, germs are more likely to grow. When we are unhealthy the acid fluid can change and we are more likely to get vaginal infections.

There are other times when we are more likely to get vaginal infections. In the summer! This is because germs grow quickly in warmth and wet. Pregnant women and women who use contraception like the Pill or the Injection get vaginal infections more easily. This is because these things change the acid fluid in your vagina and germs can grow more easily. Women with sugar sickness (diabetes) get vaginal infections more easily. Some antibiotics, which you could be taking for treating something else, can make you get a vaginal infection. You can ask your doctor about this when she gives you antibiotics.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE A VAGINAL INFECTION

There are some ways in which you can treat yourself. A woman told us "I used plain yogurt in my vagina. It is not easy because it is rather runny! I used a syringe without the needle to put it in. It can help to prevent and cure mild vaginal infections. This is because yogurt is acidic and it helps to get the vagina back to its normal acidity. It also soothes the itchiness."



Some women wash inside their vaginas with a mixture of 2 teaspoons of vinegar in 1 litre of warm water. It helps in the same way as yogurt does. It is not good to do this too much because there is always the chance that more germs may be brought in. It is also not good to wash inside your vagina often. The vagina washes itself out naturally.



If you have a vaginal infection it is a good idea to see a doctor. Sometimes you have to take antibiotics to clear it up. The antibiotics can be pills to take, or creams or pessaries which you put into your vagina. Make sure that the antibiotics you take have been prescribed by a doctor for your infection. There are different vaginal infections which are caused by different germs.



If you don't take the right antibiotic your infection won't clear up. This can be dangerous as the infection can move up to the womb, tubes and ovaries and cause infection there as well. When you take antibiotics you must make sure that you finish the whole tube of cream, pessaries or tablet course. If you don't finish the course, your infection will come back.

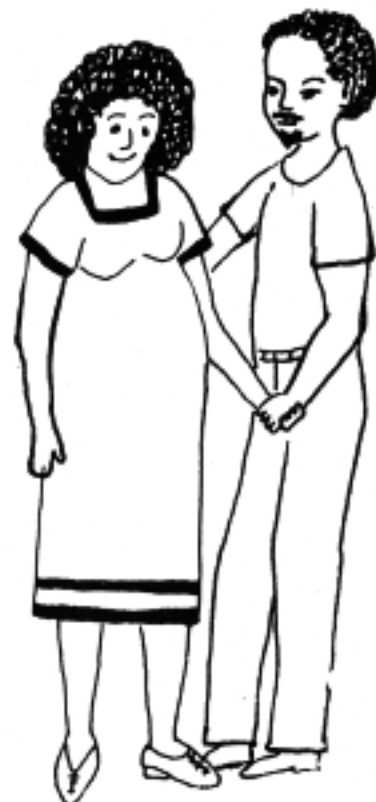
HOW TO TRY AND AVOID GETTING A VAGINAL INFECTION

- * Nylon pantyhose and underpants and tight pants keep in heat and wetness and this helps harmful germs to grow. This is made worse by the hot climate we live in. It is best to wear clean cotton underwear
- * Feminine hygiene sprays (or any other sprays) can cause skin irritation and infections.
- * If you wipe yourself from front to back you can prevent germs getting from the anus to the vagina.
- * Childbirth and painful sex can cause tears and cuts in the vagina. Germs can grow quickly in a cut or tear. If you do have a cut or a tear in your vagina, try not to have anything in your vagina as this will increase the number of germs there. This makes it more easy for you to get an infection.
- * If your vagina is dry during sex, use KY Jelly or birth control creams. This will help to stop your vagina from getting small tears during sex.
- * Tampons, because they are put inside you can make it more likely to get a vaginal infection. If you use tampons make sure your hands are clean when



you put the tampon in.

- * Talk to your partner. An understanding and caring partner can be a great help when it comes to dealing with preventing and curing vaginal infections. Infections can be avoided if male sexual partners are clean. If your partner uses a condom this can prevent an infection from starting or getting worse. It is better not to have sex when you have a vaginal infection. This will only make your infection worse.
- * Your partner can carry an infection. Even if you treat yours, you could get it back again from him. Sometimes it is good for him to take antibiotics as well to make sure that this doesn't happen.



WHO GETS VAGINAL INFECTIONS?

Women of all ages get vaginal infections. Women who have no sexual partners get vaginal infections. So do women who have one or more sexual partners. If you have a vaginal infection it does not mean that you have VD. Vaginal infections are as common as 'flu. There is no need to feel shy or embarrassed at having a vaginal infection. They are very common. We do not feel shy about other illnesses. It is only by talking about vaginal infections that we'll find new ways of avoiding and coping with them.

WOMEN UNITE



*Equal pay
Housing
for
all
maternity
rights
End
violence
against
women
House-
work and
child-
care
must be
shared*

INTERNATIONAL

WOMENS DAY MARCH 8