

THE ART OF RESEARCH



Bacterial vaginosis: Your microbes matter

Researchers at the University of Cape Town are trying to unpack the role of some of these negative bacteria that may cause bacterial vaginosis in women.

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Isolating the bacteria that cause bacterial vaginosis can lead to healthier lifestyles for women.

Presented in association with the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine, this programme forms part of #theArtofResearch, an initiative of research communication specialists Jive Media Africa.



Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is an extremely real issue for many women in sub-Saharan Africa, yet it is not often spoken about or even known about. BV has been linked to premature birth and can increase susceptibility to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, making it an important issue in the South African context.

Researchers of the Mucosal Immunity Group (MIG) at the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine (IDM) at the University of Cape Town are working to understand how the bacterial microbiome of

the female reproductive tract can impact a woman's health and how the bacteria play a role in BV.

"There are certain bacterial species that are essential for good health, and others that may be detrimental. We are studying *Prevotella bivia*, the bacteria that may contribute to BV, to understand how to treat women who experience this condition," says Kirsten Welp.

"The goal is that by understanding the 'villains' of the microbiome, we can figure out how to fight them, potentially by using probiotics with the optimal vaginal bacteria

(*Lactobacillus* species) to overcome BV."

This research is focused on South African women in particular, and how to alleviate BV in southern Africa. The research relies on funders to encourage vaginal microbiome research in South Africa, as well as on improved sexual health education to instil the importance of female reproductive health in young women.

"It also calls on communities to leave room for open conversation about reproductive health, without judgement."

