

# The Chemicals of Love – Five Ways Science Helps You Get Turned On

Humans have been trying to find a chemical shortcut to love (or just lust) for thousands of years. But has anyone proven that aphrodisiacs work? Yes! Today, we give you five scientifically-verified substances that get you ready for love.

There are two types of aphrodisiacs: traditional foods or chemicals that have a reputation for enhancing or causing sexual desire; and foods or drugs that affect physical arousal, making us better able to act on our desires. Regardless of the chemical results, users may experience a placebo effect with any of these substances. Just don't slip someone an aphrodisiac without telling them – not only would that be a terrible (and illegal) thing to do, but they wouldn't even benefit from the placebo effect.

Here are five aphrodisiacs whose reputations as love-enhancers actually have a scientific basis.

## **Oysters**

These molluscs are usually first on a long list of foods thought to have sexual properties. Some people think the slurping of the oyster itself is somehow sexual, putting the brain in gear for additional slurping (personally, making a connection between devouring a bivalve and any sexual act seems like more of a turn-off). There is research showing certain amino acids in oysters activate hormone production in lab rats. Are you turned on yet?

## **Spanish Fly**

This legendary substance is one of the creepiest aphrodisiacs. For one thing, it's derived from insect urine and/or ground up insects. The key chemical is cantharides, produced by members of the blister beetle family. This chemical irritates the bladder and urethra and causes swelling, which may superficially appear to mimic the signs of arousal in both men and women. It certainly doesn't put anyone in the mood for sex, however, and cantharides is actually highly poisonous. A slightly higher dose and your lover will go from "painful swelling" to "agonizing death." Sexy.

## **Chocolate**

Truly great chocolate is often said to be "better than sex," but can it make sex better? The anandamide and phenylethylamine in chocolate trigger the release of endorphins, which make you feel good. Have you ever experienced the euphoria after a good workout, or...well, good sex? That's the kind of feeling chocolate can supposedly mimic. Dark chocolate works best, but don't overindulge. Then you'll just feel fat.

## **Alcohol**

Alcohol doesn't affect sexual response in positive ways. In fact, too much of it restricts sexual function, making it difficult to achieve an erection. On the other hand, it is widely known to reduce inhibitions. Far too many "I never thought this would happen to me" stories start with a few innocent sips of an alcoholic beverage for us to overlook the fruits of fermentation. Just remember, there's a fine line between "slutty drunk" and "curled up in a puddle of your own vomit."

## **Viagra**

The amazing thing about Viagra is that it relaxes the smooth muscle in one specific part of the body, and only during periods of sexual arousal. How is it so perfectly targeted? The system that causes an erection involves a complex series of chemical reactions, the result of which is more blood flowing into the penis than out of it as the arteries in the area relax. The chemical that relaxes those arteries degrades as a natural part of this cycle. Viagra and other drugs like it interfere with this cycle and stop the chemical from degrading. It turns out that a specific version of this chemical exists only in the genital region. If not for that biochemical quirk, Viagra would help you get an erection, but it would also cause your digestive system to cease functioning, result in a loss of bladder control and possibly stop your heart.

Viagra's effects also work for some women who have a physiological sexual problem – increased blood flow improves lubrication and can make sex more pleasurable. However, researchers are still working on a Viagra-like drug specifically designed to work for women.

The coolest thing about Viagra, however, is that its development stems from one of the greatest "mad scientist" stories in the annals of science history. Dr. Giles Brindley had something of a reputation as a researcher with a flair for theatrics even before the American Urological Association's 1983 conference in Las Vegas. Dr. Brindley had spent months injecting his penis with various chemicals, searching for a vasodilator that would affect smooth muscle in such a way as to overcome erectile dysfunction. He finally

found one, phenoxybenzamine, which produced an instant erection in the absence of any sexual stimulus. But he was not content to simply *tell* the AUA about it. Dr. Brindley injected his penis with phenoxybenzamine immediately prior to his talk, then dropped his pants on stage and displayed his medically induced erection for the entire audience. He published a paper on his research, but never appeared on *Mr. Wizard's World*.

So while there's no such thing as a magic love potion, we do have magic erection pills. But I still think one of the best aphrodisiacs science has to offer is also one of the simplest: Wearing a lab coat with nothing underneath.

**Sources:**

Brain, Marshall. "[How Viagra Works](#)."

Harris, Erin. "The Aphrodisiac Myth." *Men's Health*, June 2009.

Showalter, Allan. "[Professor Giles Brindley – Extreme Show & Tell](#)."

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