

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

Galactorrhea is derived from the Greek "galakto", meaning milk. This root also forms the basis of the word "galaxy" - otherwise known as the Milky Way.

Q. My girlfriend is not pregnant and she has never had children, but she's lactating. Is there something wrong?

A. What you describe is a condition called galactorrhea (pronounced "guh-lak-tuh-ree-uh"), and is characterized by a spontaneous flow of breast milk in the absence of childbirth or a nursing child. Though uncommon, galactorrhea is most likely seen in women, but can also show up in men in rare instances.

Possible causes of galactorrhea are many and may include:

- Starting a new medication
- Taking herbs such as nettle, fennel, thistle, anise or others
- Drug use, particularly marijuana and opiates
- Wearing clothing that irritates the breasts
- Breast stimulation through sexual activity or very frequent self-exams

Since unexplained lactation is sometimes a sign of other, more serious issues, it's important that your girlfriend make an appointment with a health care provider. Galactorrhea has been linked to hormonal imbalances as well as tumors of the pituitary gland, which are usually benign (non-cancerous) and highly treatable.

It's also a good idea to tell her provider if she is experiencing headaches, vision problems, less interest in sex, increased hair growth, acne or irregular menstrual periods, since all of these factors will help in the diagnosis. If she has been sexually active, a pregnancy test may also be called for to see if that is a possible reason for hormone changes. Whatever the cause identified by a health care provider, you can both take comfort in knowing that most of the time galactorrhea will clear up with limited or no treatment at all.

To schedule an appointment at Campus Health Service call 621-9202 or simply stop by. Campus Health is located in the Highland Commons Building just west of 6th St. and Highland Ave. For more answers to your questions on health and wellness check out www.health.arizona.edu.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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