

Sexuality

enough to spur a belief that it's a sexual stimulant. The use of animal horns, in fact, gave us a term for feeling sexually aroused: horny.

Until recently, scientists dismissed all this stuff as quaintly fraudulent and insisted that the power of suggestion was all that fueled any reported benefits. "It's very difficult to separate effects on the mind from those on the body," says Varro Tyler, PhD, professor of pharmacognosy (natural-products pharmacy) at Purdue University School of Pharmacy. "Sexual enjoyment involves both mind and body equally, so anything people consider arousing becomes arousing."

Horn again

If all of this has aroused your skepticism about aphrodisiacs, good; you'll save yourself some money. But don't get too cynical. Scientists have been learning that some old reputed sexual enhancers, and some surprising new ones, actually work. Some are pre-



productivity, the immune system, athletic ability and prowess of a more intimate nature. American scientists remain skeptical. But James Duke, PhD, a botanist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Research Station in Beltsville, Maryland, and author of *Ginseng: A Concise Handbook* (Reference Publications, 1990), cites

States was recommended by early American folk healers as a breast enlarger, diuretic and treatment for benign prostate enlargement. Recent research shows some support for the latter two benefits.

● **Wild yam.** This tuber's sexual reputation springs from its age-old use as a remedy for gynecological ailments. It

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scription drugs, which mostly benefit men and women who suffer from diagnosable medical problems. Others are foods, herbs and even colors and aromas that may heighten sexual mood in all people. Among them are the following:

- **Caffeine** (in coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate and colas). Arab caliphs sipped coffee before visiting their harems, and Montezuma and Casanova ate chocolate to fortify themselves for lovin'. But caffeine may do more than simply keep lovers awake until the end of the 10 o'clock news. University of Michigan urologist Ananias Diokno, MD, found that coffee drinkers were considerably more active sexually than nondrinkers. He studied couples over age 60, but caffeine stimulates people of all ages.
- **Ginseng.** Asians insist ginseng boosts

several Asian and Russian studies showing that the herb may indeed promote sexual function. Herbalists say ginseng preparations, which are available at health-foods stores, must be used for several months before producing any noticeable stimulant effect.

● **Oysters.** Scientists scoffed at their reputation until nutritionists discovered that they are, indeed, exceptionally rich in the trace mineral zinc, which is crucial for male reproductive health. Whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables also contain zinc, while processed foods are often low in the nutrient. Deficiencies are associated with infertility and prostate problems. In fact, University of Rochester researchers have restored sperm counts in infertile men using zinc.

● **Saw palmetto.** This small palm tree native to the southeastern United

turns out that wild yam is a potent source of diosgenin, a chemical that resembles the female sex hormones used in birth control pills.

● **Yohimbine.** For centuries, the bark of the African yohimbine tree has been reputed to restore potency. Studies conducted in the 1980s showed that it does raise erections in some impotent men by increasing blood flow to the penis. A few years ago, the Food and Drug Administration approved yohimbine as an impotence treatment. It's available in three prescription drugs: Aphrodyne (Star Pharmaceuticals), Yocon (Palisades Pharmaceuticals) and Yohimex (Kramer Laboratories). Yohimbine extract is also available in health-food stores.

While many traditional aphrodisiacs have shown some performance-enhancing effects, nothing even