

*Canesten*<sup>®</sup>

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# You Asked Us To

**Empower** women, girls, and non-binary people to talk **openly** about their bodies.

Identify a female intimate health taboo and create an innovative product, service, or campaign to **break it**.

Show how it works in one liberal and one conservative market.



## The Taboo

Women's learned shame for their  
vaginas conditions them to ignore  
what's "down there".

# 75%

of women **experience thrush at least once in their lives**, most are too reticent to admit it or discuss it.

# 40%

of young women feel **confused** or **uneasy** about changes in vaginal discharge, smells, or sensations, leading to fear or avoidance of medical care.

# 1/3

of women with abnormal vaginal discharge **do not seek medical advice**.



# Country-Specific Markets

## UK

Women's health is an increasingly open topic, but many taboos around vaginal health harm women and non-binary people.

The UK offers a **large, receptive audience** to Canesten's claims, offering room to lead the conversation rather than tiptoe around it.

How BV makes women feel	
Dirty	<p><i>I feel unclean. I wanna shower all the time because I just feel, I don't know, I just feel dirty (Participant 25, age 37)</i></p> <p><i>...Ok, it makes me feel dirty. It makes me feel you know, not really that keen to have sexual... you know relationships with me. Um, it's really embarrassing, and... I just really don't like it. It's just really yeah horrible (Participant 15, age 37)</i></p>


Embarrassed and ashamed	<p><i>...I had a new lover and I was travelling and it came back and I was so embarrassed and ashamed about it (Participant 33, age 28)</i></p> <p><i>Well I don't because like I said it's, well... embarrassing because I don't always know when it's starting and yeah, so... it can be quite embarrassing (Participant 34, age 42)</i></p>
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 Reddit · r/WomensHealth  
2 comments · 1 year ago


### I'm scared of my own vagina : r/WomensHealth

I've thought that I was lesbian, but **vaginas gross me out** too. I can't watch any porn because it scares me, I don't even touch my own vagina, ...

I started getting discharge when I started my period around 13/14, but no one ever mentioned the concept to me. I assumed my body was abnormal until I was 18 or so.


 **izzardsl** · 11y ago

I noticed it when I was like 12 or 13, but I had no idea about whether it was normal or not and nobody ever spoke about it. I just ignored it and never investigated, but I would say I was





 Reddit · r/Healthyhooha  
30+ comments · 1 year ago

### Afraid and confused about my own anatomy : r/Healthyhooha

I've only ever cleaned myself in the most cursory way, looking away and rubbing warm water into what I now know was the space between my labia ...

 **[deleted]** · 11y ago

I started noticing discharge when I was 12/13. Didn't know what it was and thought something was wrong with my vagina for a long time. I had almost no sex education growing up now that I think of it.

 1   Award  Share ...



# Country-Specific Markets

## UAE

The UAE is a conservative market, but women's health is gaining more and more visibility under **recent government initiatives for women empowerment**.

Societal & cultural norms still make intimate health topics sensitive, but campaigns framed through science and wellness are well received.

The UAE lets Canesten prove the brand's ability to adapt to **cultural nuances**.

- In a study of 500 women in Najran, Saudi Arabia, 4.6% reported complaints of vaginismus, though underreporting is likely due to stigma and cultural barriers. [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37111111/)

## First menstruation is often accompanied by fear, shame, lack of information, women and girls in Arab states reveal

📅 28 May 2021

“Astonishingly, most women don’t know what it really looks like ‘down there’... This may be because of their upbringing, the traditions and social pressure that forbid them from asking or trying to know about the intimate areas.” — Yasmin Abo el Azm, Egyptian gynecologist

DUBAI: Conversations around female intimate health have long been taboo or non-existent in Arab cultures. But a new crop of female doctors and healthcare practitioners on social media are aiming to destigmatize sexual wellness and educate women about their health, one Instagram post at a time.

“There are so many stereotypical taboos regarding women’s health in the UAE,” Dr. Deemah Salem told Arab News.





## The Truth

Over 50% of girls and young women  
felt shame or embarrassment about  
“looking downstairs” and  
understanding vaginal changes.

## When Samantha was 13,

she wore tight leggings all day on a field trip. When she came home, she noticed something in her underwear that didn't look right. She had no idea what it was or if it was normal. She scrolled TikTok, searched Google in secret, and felt gross either way. She was too embarrassed to ask her mom and too afraid to tell a friend.

## Now she's 18.

She technically knows more about discharge, but it still freaks her out. Her boyfriend once made an offhand comment about it that left her feeling weird and a little dirty even though she knew he was just clueless. Most days she'd rather ignore whatever shows up in her underwear than deal with the stress of figuring out what it means.



## The Insight

We can't understand what we're too  
ashamed to look at.



What if we could move girls and women from  
feeling afraid of their discharge to being  
empowered to understand their bodies?



# Strategy

## What

Despite being made to support women’s health, Canesten exists in a category shaped by discomfort, where even normal bodily functions like discharge carry cultural shame.

## Why

Women have long felt uncomfortable with their own anatomy, but the social climate – in both Western and conservative markets – is shifting toward greater openness and body awareness.

## Who

18 – 25 y/o women who are uneasy about their own anatomy. They’re open, curious, and value self-care, yet vaginal health remains a blind spot.

## How

Turn an overlooked, uncomfortable moment into a private ritual that feels calm, normal, and empowering.

When it comes to vaginal health, your underwear usually knows what's up before you do.

The issue? Many girls have been taught to feel uncomfortable even looking. Generations of stigma have made something as normal as discharge feel embarrassing, so we ignore it instead of understanding it.

Our campaign aims to change that. It turns a quick glance into a simple, private ritual. A small act of awareness that replaces fear with confidence. And because it's a quiet and personal practice, the idea works naturally even in more conservative markets.

We want women to see their bodies as something to understand, not fear. And when something *is* off, whether it's thrush or bacterial vaginosis, Canesten is there to help with a trusted range of products to bring the balance back.

# Undie Check

