

# WOMEN'S HEALTH

## Stigma Prevents Women From Discussing Health Issues

(NAPSA)—Although women have made progress in so many areas, when it comes to their own bodies and being comfortable talking about their sexual health, women still have a long way to go, according to a recent survey.

The survey, conducted for the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals by Harris Interactive, found that negative self-perceptions, social stigma and a lack of information may prevent women from discussing and taking an active role in their reproductive and sexual health.

More than 1,100 women expressed their attitudes toward and perceptions of their vaginas in the survey, which revealed that nearly three in four women surveyed (73 percent) believe that the vagina is a shocking topic.

While women are more in tune with their bodies and their sexuality than ever before, survey results show that more than one-third (35 percent) of the women surveyed are too uncomfortable to have discussions about their vaginas.

Feelings of embarrassment appear to stem from social stigma. Fifty-nine percent of women agree that society has too many misconceptions about aspects of female sexuality.

These perceptions may inhibit women from discussing and examining their bodies and may also lead to negative self-perceptions.

Discomfort talking about the subject leads many women to avoid the issue, even with their



physicians. According to the survey, one out of five women is too uncomfortable to talk to her own doctor. To get the help they need, women may need to learn more and be more proactive.

“Women need to become more comfortable with their bodies, especially talking about sexual health,” said Margaret Thompson, M.D., founder and practicing physician, Renaissance Women’s Group, Austin, Texas. “The more we know about our bodies, the more options become available to us.”

Most women are not aware that the vagina is an optimal site for the administration of medication. Several FDA-approved medications are administered vaginally, including the contraceptive vaginal ring (marketed under the name NuvaRing™), as well as products used for hormone replacement therapy. For more information, visit [arhp.org/vagina](http://arhp.org/vagina) dialogues.