Oysters have long been thought of as an aphrodisiac. Does science agree?

For centuries, people have considered oysters an aphrodisiac, with at least one legendary lover, Giacomo Casanova, reportedly attributing his sexual prowess to eating dozens of them at a time.

Experts say these briny mollusks do contain elements that may enhance sex drive, though there is no scientific evidence showing a direct link to a more robust libido.

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Raw oysters are high in zinc — a 3.5-ounce serving contains more than five times the recommended daily amount for an male adult and more than seven times for a female adult. Zinc is associated with improved testosterone levels, which influences male and female sex drives, and is essential for male fertility, research shows.

Zinc also boosts dopamine, a neurotransmitter involved in pleasure and reward-seeking behaviors and may influence sexual responses in men and women, said Julia Zumpano, a registered dietitian for the Center for Human Nutrition at the Cleveland Clinic.

There’s another explanation as to why oysters may bring out a romantic side: the placebo effect, said Waguih William IsHak, a professor of psychiatry at Cedars-Sinai and the University of California at Los Angeles… Meta-analyses on placebo treatments for male and female sexual dysfunction have shown that people given a placebo reported an improvement in sexual functioning — in some studies, at a rate as high as 50 percent.

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