

Vaginal Dryness

What is vaginal dryness?

Vaginal dryness can be caused by lower estrogen levels that cause the vagina to get drier and less elastic. This can happen naturally in perimenopause and menopause, or through cancer treatments.

Common reasons for vaginal dryness include:

- Menopause
- Chemotherapy
- Radiation therapy
- Hormone blocking therapy
- Removal of uterus or ovaries
- Infection
- Douching
- Medications

Vaginal dryness MAY feel like:

- a “sandpaper-like” sensation
- Vaginal soreness, burning, itching and pain
- Burning with urination
- Slight vaginal discharge
- Discomfort during sexual activity
- Light bleeding after penetration

How to manage vaginal dryness?

There are many treatment options for vaginal dryness. Before using any of the following treatments it is important to talk with your care team about the best treatment for you. Most of these can be bought over the counter at your local pharmacy.

Here are a few options to choose from:

- **Vaginal Moisturizers (Gynatrof®, Yes®, RepaGyn®)**

Moisturizers help keep the lining of the vagina moist and healthy, and they also help to adjust the Ph of the vagina. They come in gel, cream or suppository form and are put into the vagina with a tampon-shaped applicator. These products do not contain estrogen. It is best to use before bed and make sure to rub some of the moisturizer onto the external genitals.

- **Vaginal Lubricant (Sylk®, Astroglide®)**

A lubricant is a liquid or gel that reduces friction or discomfort that is shorter acting than a moisturizer that allows for temporary relief of vaginal dryness. Be sure to choose a water-based/water-soluble or silicone-based product. Never use petroleum jelly as a lubricant.

- **Vaginal Estrogen (Vagifem®, Premarin®)**

Vaginal estrogen is a hormonal medication that is placed directly into the vagina using an applicator. These products contain a low dose of estrogen that increases vaginal moisture and its ability to stretch. These are available by prescription. DO NOT use without speaking with your cancer care team.

- **Natural (Vitamin E/Coconut Oil)**

Some women may choose to use a natural oil such as vitamin E, avocado or coconut oil. You can break a vitamin E capsule and rub the oil into the vulva (outer genitals). Do not use oils with condoms as the oils will damage the condoms. Do not use mineral oil, baby oil or body lotions on or in your genitals. Although there is not any medical evidence to support the use of natural oils, many patients have found that these oils work very well for vaginal dryness.

Possible complications of vaginal dryness:

- You may be more likely to get a yeast or bacterial infections (i.e., UTI).
- May cause sores or cracks in the walls of the vagina.
- Can cause pain with sexual activity, which may affect your relationship with your partner. Talking openly with your partner may help.

To help prevent vaginal dryness:

- do not use scented soaps, lotions or perfumes.
- do not use mineral oil, baby oil or body lotions on or in your genitals.
- do not use petroleum-based lubricants or products. This can increase your risk of infection.
- do not douche.

For more information on vulva care, please see the Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlet titled Vulvar Skin Care Tips: <https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/1513>

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*It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.
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