

VAGINAL DRYNESS

Thank you for asking about vaginal dryness, pain, irritation and sexual discomfort. This is a VERY common condition, especially in menopause. You are not alone! This sometimes occurs with low dose birth control pills or during breastfeeding. It arises because of **atrophy** – low amounts of estrogen - and, unfortunately, it tends to get worse over time unless you actively employ a regimen to maintain healthy, soft, supple, well-functioning normal tissue.

First, it is important to have an exam to make sure that there are no other issues at hand such as a yeast infection, allergic reaction, sexually transmitted disease, abnormal tissue growth, etc. Then, if we determine the cause of the symptoms to be thin, dry, delicate, easily cracking tissue, there are many treatment regimens that can be used to keep that area feeling better.

Lots of women need a personal **lubricant** for sexual relations. Choose the one that you and your partner enjoy the most. Some readily available (grocery or natural food store) options are:

- KY Jelly (water based, tends to need reapplication)
- Replens (glycerin and mineral oil based)
- Astroglide (glycerin based, works well)
- Vitamin E Oil, Hemp Oil } (these oils have the added benefit of helping to heal)
- Mineral Oil, Almond Oil }
- Saliva (why not?)

Some women need more **healing** and constant maintenance with topical salves on a regular basis, ranging from 1 – 7 nights per week. **Over-the-counter** choices are:

- Herbal Salves (comfrey, calendula, St. John's Wort, etc.)
- Vitamin E cream
- Replens (gives immediate moisturizing, apply every few days)

Prescription options include hormonal products, in a low dose, topical form used 1- 3 nights per week, or in a higher dose, systemic regimen used on a daily basis. Individualized therapy is needed based on each woman's personal history and goals.

- Topical Estrogen: Estrace Cream, Estring (3 month intravaginal ring), Vagifem (intravaginal tablet)
- Systemic Estrogen: Tablet: Estrace, Premarin, Cenestin, Activella, Enjuvia, FemHRT, etc.
Climara or Vivelle Patch, FemRing, EstroGel, Divigel, Femtrace
(All these require systemic progesterone if a woman has a uterus in place)
- Topical Testosterone: for severe cases of Lichen Sclerosis, etc.

Most women get the best results from massaging their choice of topical product with a firm pressure right into the vaginal opening. Some women also need to use a vaginal dilator (or have regular penile penetration) to keep the vaginal opening from closing in too tight.

I hope this handout helps you with understanding and treating your condition. If you have any questions or problems, please call me at 603-516-0000 or email me at drterri@bestgyn.com.

I am always at your service, ~ Dr. Terri Vanderlinde