

Vaginal Dryness

Vaginal dryness is a common symptom for women with low levels of estrogen. It can be caused by menopause or the effects of cancer treatment. Estrogen levels drop and the membranes of the vagina get thinner, become less flexible and produce less lubricating fluid. Symptoms include vaginal itching, burning and pain or discomfort during sex.

Estrogen replacement is a common treatment for vaginal dryness. However, it may not be the first choice for some women. An alternative is to use a vaginal moisturizer and/or lubricant. This does not use hormones. This information sheet describes how to select and use these products.

Vaginal Moisturizers

Use often
Keeps the lining of the vagina moist

Vaginal Lubricants

Use as needed
Reduces rubbing during sexual activity

Moisturizers

Vaginal moisturizers help condition the vagina which keeps the tissues healthy and moist. They also help relieve soreness, itching, burning and other discomfort caused by dryness.

You do not need a prescription for a moisturizer. Most come in the form of a gel or liquid, which is inserted into the vagina.

How to Use

Moisturizers are most effective when used often. You can use it every day, not just for sex. Follow the instructions on the package.

Many of the intravaginal moisturizers correct or “normalize” the vaginal pH. An unhealthy vagina has a more “basic” pH while a healthy vagina is more acidic. Use of a moisturizer helps to change the pH. Expect some vaginal discharge the first time you use the moisturizer. You should have less discharge within 1 to 2 weeks. It may be helpful to apply just before bedtime to reduce leakage. Wear a panty liner or mini pad to absorb extra moisturizer.

Vaginal Moisturizers

Examples of gels with applicators include:

- Replens®
- Hyalo GYN®
- Emerita Feminine Personal Moisturizer
- Lubrigyn
- Luvena
- Me Again™
- PrevaLeaf Oasis Natural Daily Vaginal Moisturizer

Lubricants

Lubricants (lubes) can make sexual activity easier and more comfortable. They are only used when needed. Lubes have a very slippery feel. Many are made to feel like a woman's natural moisture. Some women who use a vaginal moisturizer may still need a lubricant to make sex more comfortable.

How to Use

Apply generously to the genital area shortly before sexual activity. Make sure to cover the inner labia, clitoral area and any parts that feel dry or "tug" during sex. If you plan to have sex or penetration, be sure to apply to the vaginal entrance. Apply to your or your partner's fingers, penis or sex toy. Reapply as needed.

Understand the Ingredients

There are many types of lubricants. Look at the ingredient list before you decide on which to buy. General guidelines for choosing are below:

- Water-based lubes include brands such as Astroglide® and K-Y® Liquid. Since water evaporates, these may need to be applied a few times during sexual activity. They can be "reactivated" with a small amount of water. Many of these have glycerin (see below), which can make the product last longer. Water-based lubes are the best choice for use with silicone dilators or sex toys.
- Silicone-based lubes (look for dimethicone or cyclomethicone in the ingredient list) last longer than those that are water-based. However, they may cost more and do not wash off as easily as water-based lubes. These lubricants can be used underwater (for example, while in a pool). Do not use in the shower as they are extremely slippery and can cause falls. Silicone-based lubes are safe to use with latex condoms. However, do not use with dilators or sex toys made from silicone. They can damage the material over time.
- Not all women will react the same way to any given ingredient. However, certain ingredients can cause side effects. Before you use a new lube, test a small amount on your inner thigh to see how your body responds. When you choose a lubricant or moisturizer, **be aware of the following ingredients:**
 - **Glycerin** is sometimes added to water-based lubes to make them last longer. However, it may irritate women with very sensitive skin. It may also increase your risk of yeast infections if you are prone to them.
 - **Parabens** (such as, methylparaben, butylparaben) are preservatives used in cosmetics and personal care products. They may irritate you if you have very sensitive skin.

- **Perfumes and flavoring agents:** Perfumes are not recommended for sensitive skin. They may cause irritation. Flavored lubricants, which are used for oral stimulation, should be OK. However, test on a small area first.
- **“Warming” agents (such as, menthol, L-arginine):** Some women enjoy the sensation of “warming liquids.” These may bother delicate skin. Use with caution. L-arginine can also trigger an outbreak in women with genital herpes.
- **Propylene glycol** is a skin conditioning agent found in skin and hair care products. It may cause irritation in women who have chronic vulvar pain (vulvodynia).

Vaginal Lubricants

Name	Texture	Water-Based	Silicone-Based	Contains Glycerin	Contains Parabens
Astroglide	Liquid	X		X	X
Astroglide Glycerin & Paraben Free	Liquid	X			
ID Glide	Liquid	X		X	X
ID Millenium	Liquid		X		
K-Y Personal Lubricant	Liquid or gel	X		X	X
Liquid Silk*	Creamy liquid	X			X
Pink	Liquid		X		
Please Cream*	Creamy liquid	X			
Sliquid Organics	Liquid	X			
Slippery Stuff	Liquid	X			X
Wet Naturals Silky Supreme	Gel		X		
Wet Platinum	Liquid		X		

* Contains a small amount of silicone; safe to use with silicone dilators

Do not use

Do not use the following, as they may increase dryness or irritation:

- Any type of vaginal douches (if you have had a vaginal reconstruction, douching may be appropriate; however, ask your health care provider first)
- Hand lotion, perfume, powder, deodorant or soap in the vaginal area
- Bubble baths
- Tight clothing, synthetic fabrics and tampons (some panty liners can also irritate the pelvic area)

Petroleum or mineral oil-based products, such as Vaseline® and baby oil, are **not recommended** for use inside your vagina. These products do not wash away easily, which can cause infection. They can also break down latex condoms.

These medicines can contribute to vaginal dryness. If possible, do not use these medicines.

- Antihistamines (long-term use), such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl®) or chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton®)
- Decongestants (long-term use), such as pseudoephedrine (Sudafed®)

Be cautious if you use complementary and alternative medicines. Do not assume that plant estrogens or “natural” supplements are safe. Some may have hormones or act like hormones in the body. Talk with your health care provider before you use any dietary supplement, herb, vitamin or mineral.

When to See Your Health Care Provider

Contact your provider:

- If the above products do not help or your symptoms get worse
- If the itching does not go away. This may be a symptom of other problems.
- If you notice bleeding with the dryness.

Talk with your health care provider. Your provider may prescribe medicine to treat vaginal dryness. Talk about any risks, benefits and alternatives before you use any prescribed medicine.

Talk with your partner about how you feel. Communication is key to understand each other and the changes in your body.

Resources

Ask for the patient information sheet, **Menopause**.

The following websites sell sexual health products and ship in discreet packaging. Be sure to check an online seller’s reputation before you make a purchase.

- Drugstore.com (<http://www.drugstore.com>): Look for the “Sexual Well-Being” tab.
- Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com>): Look in the Health and Wellness Department.
- Good Vibrations (<http://www.goodvibes.com>)
- A Woman’s Touch (<http://www.a-womans-touch.com>)
- MyPleasure (<http://www.mypleasure.com>)
- Too Timid (<http://www.tootimid.com>)
- HyaloGYN vaginal moisturizer (<http://www.hyalogyn.com>)
- Yes Yes Yes lubricants (<http://www.yesyesyes.org>)
- MiddlesexMD (<https://middlesexmd.com/pages/sex-after-breast-cancer>)