



Vaginal Health & Sex in Menopause



A recent survey showed that 40% of postmenopausal women experience vaginal dryness that makes sex uncomfortable. Because of personal privacy and embarrassment, only a limited number of these women report this to their doctor.

Without estrogen the vaginal tissues often become thin and dry. Then during intercourse friction creates discomfort. This has become increasingly problematic with the dramatic decline in the use of systemic hormone replacement therapy. Estrogen thickens the vaginal skin and increases natural secretions, both at rest and during sexual stimulation.

While not all menopausal women experience vaginal dryness, there are solutions to help those that do. First, there are over-the-counter vaginal moisturizers, and lubricants for intercourse that may suffice (often displayed near condoms at retailers). If discomfort persists then consider utilizing low dose vaginal estrogen. Topical preparations such as Premarin® and Estrace® creams, or Vagifem® tablets are FDA-approved prescriptions that are inserted into the vagina twice a week. Several recent studies demonstrated that when these medications are used at lower doses they do not change blood estrogen levels, so you can disregard the glaring “estrogen class warnings” about blood clots, uterine and breast cancer required as part of product labeling by the FDA.

Menopausal women often tolerate vaginal dryness and painful intercourse that could be improved with a little topical estrogen

A good mnemonic is to *use vaginal estrogen every Wednesday and a weekend night*. Initially it may take about a month before symptoms improve. Finally, women usually need to continue using vaginal estrogen to enjoy the benefits.

While estrogen won't correct a waning sex drive it can make sex more comfortable. That in turn may improve desire for intimacy. For more information about [woman's sexual health](#) check out the resources on our website. Please don't wait until your annual exam to seek help.

Wishing you good health!

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PS: October is Breast Cancer Awareness month. More than 70% of women who died of breast cancer had not undergone mammography within two years before diagnosis. Half who died were under age 50. If you've not been able to afford your annual mammogram, NorCal Imaging is offering to do them for \$75 during October. Let us know if you need your annual exam and mammogram requisition?

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