



Treatment options for Vulvar/Vaginal/Bladder Symptoms

The Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM) includes bothersome vaginal, vulvar (lips of the vagina), and urinary symptoms that can affect quality of life, sexual satisfaction, and your relationship with your partner. Unlike hot flashes, which typically improve with time, GSM usually worsens over time without treatment. Some people have recurrent vaginal infections and urinary tract infections. Other symptoms include burning with urination, urinary frequency, and urgency. Some people have pain with sex or vaginal dryness with or without sexual intercourse. The loss of estrogen can cause the vulvar skin to be thin and lose elasticity. This results in pain with sex, discomfort with wiping or wearing clothes, or pain with pelvic exams.

Non-Hormonal Treatments:

Vaginal lubricants: Used with sexual activity and reduce discomfort and increase pleasure by decreasing friction. These include water-, silicone-, and oil-based products. Oil-based lubricants may damage condoms and may increase the risk of vaginal infections. Lubricants should not contain flavors, warming properties, or solvents and preservatives such as propylene glycol and parabens that may cause irritation in some people.

Recommended products: Sliquid, Uberlube, Good Clean Love, Wet, Slippery Stuff

Vaginal moisturizers: Can be used regularly, often several times weekly to maintain vaginal moisture, with a goal of reducing the daily symptoms of GSM. Can be used in conjunction with vaginal estrogen. It is not to be used as a lubricant.

Recommended products: Via by SolvWellness, Revaree by Bonafide

Vaginal dilators: can stretch and enlarge the vagina if it has become too short and narrow or if involuntary tightening occurs, preventing comfortable sexual activity. Dilators can be purchased and used with the guidance of a gynecologist, physical therapist, or sex therapist. You can find dilators online or at specialty stores.

Recommended products: Milli, Intimate Rose, VWell, Soul Source

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy: Pelvic Floor exercises can strengthen weak pelvic floor muscles and relax tight ones. Pelvic floor physical therapy is available with trained therapists or there are at-home devices to help strengthen the pelvic floor and treat incontinence. We can refer you to a specialist in your area.



Prescription Medications:

If you are bothered only by vaginal dryness, you can use very low doses of estrogen placed directly into the vagina. These low doses generally do not raise blood estrogen levels above postmenopause levels and do not treat hot flashes. You do not need to take a progestogen when using only low doses of estrogen in the vagina.

If you are already on systemic hormone therapy and have symptoms of GSM, you can use vaginal estrogen to help. You do not need to stop your systemic hormone therapy. They can be used together safely.

Vaginal hormone therapy:

Estradiol vaginal cream (0.5-2 g placed on vulva/in vagina 2-3 times/week:). Side effects are headache, vaginal discharge, and vaginal itching. Covered by most insurances.

Vagifem (estradiol tablet placed in vagina twice/week, 10 µg: generic available). Side effects are headache, vaginal discharge, and vaginal itching. Covered by most insurances.

Estring (small, flexible estradiol ring placed in vagina and changed every 3 mo: 7.5 µg/d). Side effects are headache, breast tenderness, vaginal bleeding, vaginal discharge, nausea and vomiting. Some insurances cover this but there is a copay card.

Imvexxy (estradiol softgel insert placed in vagina twice/wk: 4 µg, 10 µg). Side effects are headache, breast tenderness, nausea and vomiting. Some insurances cover this but there is a copay card.

Intrarosa (Intravaginal dehydroepiandrosterone, DHEA). A 6.5 mg vaginal insert used nightly. DHEA is a steroid which converts to estrogen and androgens in the vagina. This can help with pain with sex. Side effects are vaginal discharge, and changes on a pap smear. Some insurances cover this but there is a copay card.

Non-hormonal therapy:

Ospemifene (Osphena). Oral 60 mg tablet taken once daily. Side effects are hot flashes, sweating, vaginal bleeding, and headaches. Some insurances cover this but there is a copay card.

***This handout is to be used as a guide for education on your treatment options. The office of Dr. Jay Williamson does not receive any financial compensation for the products recommended. These products are recommended by menopause specialists, gynecologists, urologists, and many patients.