

Vaginal Dryness & Menopause

What's happening down there, and what can you do about it?

Vaginal dryness, burning, irritation, or painful sex? You're not alone—and you don't have to just live with it.

During perimenopause and menopause, changing estrogen levels can affect the vulvar, vaginal, and urinary tissues. These changes are often called **Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM)**.

Common symptoms

- Vaginal or vulvar dryness, burning, or itching
- Discomfort or pain with penetration
- Increased sensitivity or irritation
- Urinary urgency, frequency, or recurrent UTIs

Not every symptom is caused by menopause. Infections, skin conditions, and pelvic floor muscle dysfunction can cause similar problems, so persistent symptoms deserve a proper assessment.

What actually helps?

1. Vaginal estrogen

Low-dose vaginal estrogen is one of the most effective treatments for GSM. It helps restore tissue moisture, elasticity, and comfort and may reduce recurrent UTIs in appropriate patients.

It comes in several forms, including creams, vaginal tablets or inserts, and rings. Systemic absorption is generally low, and many people can use it long-term under the guidance of their healthcare provider.

2. Vaginal moisturizers

Unlike lubricants, which are used during sexual activity, vaginal moisturizers provide ongoing hydration and comfort.

Products containing **hyaluronic acid** can be especially helpful. Many moisturizers are used several times per week, depending on the product.

3. Lubricants

A good lubricant can significantly reduce friction and discomfort during intimacy.

Water-based and silicone-based lubricants are both options. Choose a product that feels comfortable, and avoid ingredients or fragrances that cause irritation.

4. External vulvar care

The vulvar skin may also benefit from gentle, fragrance-free care and an appropriate external moisturizer or barrier balm.

Avoid harsh soaps, scented products, and unnecessary cleansing inside the vagina.

5. Pelvic floor physical therapy

Hormonal changes aren't always the whole story. Pelvic floor muscle tension, sensitivity, and pain can contribute to discomfort with intimacy.

Pelvic floor PT can help address these factors through individualized education, relaxation strategies, movement, and treatment.

The bottom line

Vaginal dryness and discomfort are common, but they are treatable.

You deserve comfortable movement, intimacy, and everyday activities. There is no single solution for everyone, and a combination of treatments may work best.

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This guide is for educational purposes and does not replace individualized medical advice. Seek medical evaluation for unexplained bleeding, persistent pain, unusual discharge, or recurrent urinary symptoms.