

Managing Vulvar & Vaginal Dryness after Breast Cancer

Challenges Following Treatment

Treatment for breast cancer may cause you to experience menopause. Your hormone levels may be suppressed as a result of medications, chemotherapy induced ovarian failure, or surgical removal of the ovaries. In menopause the hormone levels, particularly estrogen, become low. Estrogen is responsible for elasticity and pliability of the skin.

Common Concerns

Many women experience vulvar and vaginal symptoms as a result of these hormonal changes. Vaginal dryness can cause painful sex or daily discomfort. This may lead to body image concerns, low desire and have an impact on your sexual relationship.

Although common, these are not symptoms that you have to just accept and live with.

The following options are available

1. **Lubrication**
2. **Non-hormonal moisturizers**
3. **Hormonal moisturizers**

Lubricants:

For people with vaginal dryness we recommend using a **silicone or oil-based lubricant** rather than a water-based lube for optimal comfort, during sexual intercourse. *Suggestions: Uber Lube, ID Millennium, YES*

Non-Hormonal Moisturizers

These are considered first-line options to manage dryness or painful sex. Most women see improvement in their symptoms with regular use of selected products on their vulva +/- vagina. Some women have mostly vulvar dryness, vaginal dryness or a combination of both; you should target your treatments to the most affected areas.

We recommend a product with **Hyaluronic Acid (HLA) or Glaxal base** for optimal treatment.

- *Suggestions: Gynatrof, Zestica or Repagyn*
- Apply glaxal base or an HLA product to the vaginal opening 1-2 times/day.
- For vaginal dryness, we recommend an HLA product vaginally daily for 2 weeks, and then 2-3 times/week for maintenance.
- It often takes at least 1 month before you notice significant improvement in your symptoms so try to stick with a regular routine.

Local Hormonal Therapies

Studies have found NO increased risk of recurrence in patients treated for breast cancer.

Treatment options for **vulvar estrogen** include:

- *Estragyn: estrone cream*
- *Premarin: conjugated estrogen cream*
- *Compounded estrogen cream*

Treatment options for **vaginal estrogen** include:

- *Estring: estradiol secreting vaginal ring*
- *Vagifem: estradiol vaginal insert*
- *Estragyn or Premarin cream inserted with an applicator*