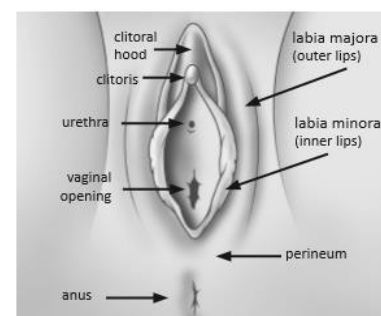


Vaginal Health

The overall health of your vagina is important regardless of your level of sexual activity. However, many people do not think about this aside from specific reproductive or sexual health concerns. The below information is what every woman (regardless of sexual activity) should know about vaginal health after menopause.

Preventive measures

The vagina and surrounding vulva are quite resilient but do require some special care. When showering or bathing, avoid using harsh soaps on the vulva, as these are alkaline and can upset the normal pH balance. Simple cleaning with water is sufficient. If you like, use a gentle soap (e.g., Dove) and be sure to clean the areas around and between the labia majora and labia minora (see diagram), but do not use soap or cleansers inside the vagina itself or around the vaginal and urethral openings, as this can be irritating and can set the stage for infection. It is important to keep the vulvar area clean, cool, and dry to avoid upsetting the normal balance of the vagina.



Note: Variation in the size and shape of sexual anatomy is normal and natural. And most adults have pubic hair.

Therefore:

- Avoid scented laundry detergents and laundry sheets.
- Avoid tight-fitting clothing including yoga pants.
- Choose cotton underwear. Avoid thongs.
- Wear only loose-fitting “boxers” or pajamas, and no underwear at night.
- Do not use “feminine hygiene” sprays, douches, or deodorants.
- Change out of wet swimsuits or sweaty workout clothing as soon as possible.
- Change pads and tampons regularly.
- Wipe from front to back after a bowel movement (from your urethra toward your anus).
- Shower or bathe regularly; encourage sexual partners to do the same.
- If sexually-active, use a new condom any time you switch from one area of penetration to another (oral, anal, or vaginal).
- Cleanse vaginal dilators, vibrator etc. with antibacterial soap and water after each use.

Internal Vaginal Moisturizers

Internal vaginal moisturizers are non-hormonal, over-the-counter products. The goal of using them is to increase moisture in the vagina and make you more comfortable. They can be used several times a week for overall vaginal health and comfort, regardless of sexual activity. These products are available without a prescription in most drug stores or online.

You can use any of these moisturizers 2 – 3 times per week. However, after cancer treatment or sudden menopause many women will need to moisturize more often (3 – 5 times per week). Apply the moisturizer at bedtime for the best absorption. You may need to wear a panty liner. If you wear a panty liner, you may want to apply a skin protectant cream such as Aquaphor® or A&D ointment® on your labia (skin outside of your vagina) to help seal in moisture. If you also use vaginal estrogen, do not use it on the same night you use these moisturizers.

Examples include the following (all products are over-the-counter):

1. **Vaginal Hydration Suppositories:** These are suppositories made with vitamin E, cocoa butter, and beeswax that are inserted into your vagina.
2. **Vitamin E liquid capsules:** Using a pin, puncture each end of a Vitamin E 1000 IU capsule. Insert the capsule into your vagina. You can also empty the capsule onto your finger and wipe the Vitamin E in the vagina.
3. **Hyalo GYN®:** This is a vaginal moisturizer that is inserted into your vagina with an applicator. You may want to put lubricant on the tip of the applicator to make insertion more comfortable.
4. **Coconut oil:** scoop out ½ - 1 teaspoon of coconut oil, place in a dish and chill in the refrigerator. This makes it easier to handle, yet the oil is still malleable. Insert the oil into your vagina and gently move it in as deep as you can with your finger.
5. **Julva** (vulvar/vagina cream): Available for purchase online.
6. **V Magic** (Intimate Skin Cream Organic): Available for purchase on Amazon.

External Vaginal Moisturizers

Many women experience dryness or irritation of the vulva. Using an external moisturizer can increase vulvar health and comfort. Natural oils such as Vitamin E or coconut oil can be helpful. Damiva Cleo is a labial moisturizer that can be purchased over the counter/online. You can also use vaginal moisturizers on your vulva.

Vaginal Lubricants

Vaginal lubricants usually come in a liquid or gel form. They are used to supplement a woman's own lubrication and minimize dryness and pain during sexual activity. Use these lubricants to make sexual activity more comfortable and pleasurable. Apply the lubricant to the opening of your vagina, inside the vagina and on whatever is being placed in or near your vagina (an applicator, dilator, finger, sex toy or penis.)

Some lubricants are water based, while others are silicone based. Water-based lubricants are recommended for silicone devices such as vaginal dilators or vibrators. Silicone-based lubricants are recommended for intercourse when vaginal dryness is a concern as it can last longer. Look for lubricant brands that do not contain perfumes, flavors, colors, spermicides, warming ingredients or chemicals such as parabens or glycerin. Experiment with different kinds to see what you prefer.

Examples of lubricants include:

- 1) Uber-Lube (silicone-based)
- 2) Good Clean Love (water-based)
- 3) Just Like Me from Pure Romance
- 4) Sylk
- 5) Astroglide
- 6) Aloe Cadabra
- 7) Almond oil
- 8) Coconut oil

Never use Vaseline®. It does not wash away easily and can increase your risk for vaginal infection or irritate your vagina.

Vaginal Estrogen

Vaginal estrogen cream or tablets are safe for most women to use. This can be true even if you have been diagnosed with a non-hormone type of cancer. Prior to use it is important that you check with your oncology care provider prior to be sure it is safe to use. This is a medication that needs to be prescribed by your physician's office.

Examples of vaginal estrogen are:

1. Vagifem®, Premarin®, Estrace®, generic estrogen vaginal cream: These medications come with an applicator. Typically, women start by using it daily for 14 days then decrease to using it two times per week.
2. Estring®: This medication comes as a vaginal ring. It is inserted into the vagina and pushed as far back as possible. The ring is changed every 90 days.
3. Compounded estrogen: Some women are sensitive to ingredients used to make estrogen medications. Those women can have estrogen suppositories or cream compounded with bases that they can tolerate.

Patient Education



For Further Information or Questions

Please ask your oncology provider for a referral to the Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center's Women's Sexual Health Clinic.

Resources

[Maintaining Vaginal Health \(cornell.edu\)](https://cornell.edu)

[A survey of the therapeutic effects of Vitamin E suppositories on vaginal atrophy in postmenopausal women \(nih.gov\)](https://nih.gov)

[Patient education: Vaginal dryness \(Beyond the Basics\) - UpToDate](#)

[Improving Your Vulvovaginal Health | Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center \(mskcc.org\)](https://mskcc.org)

[Vulvovaginal Health | ACOG](https://acog.org)