

## **Vaginal Dryness: What do I need to know?**

### *What is vaginal dryness?*

Vaginal dryness is a common problem for women who undergo cancer treatment. It occurs when the vaginal walls and genital tissue becomes less lubricated and flexible. This leaves the vaginal tissue prone to tears, and makes the vulva susceptible to cracks and fissures. Vulvovaginal dryness may also affect the urinary tract and may be exacerbated by stress and the use of condoms.

### *What are the symptoms of vaginal dryness?*

Symptoms may include pain or bleeding with sexual activity, vaginal or vulvar irritation, urinary incontinence, and burning or urgency with urination. Some women may also experience an increase bladder and urinary tract infections and watery vaginal discharge.

### *What causes vaginal dryness?*

Vaginal dryness can be caused by decreased estrogen levels. This decrease may occur naturally and may be precipitated by some types of cancer treatment such as pelvic radiation. Hormonal treatments can also significantly increase dryness, including for women who have already been through menopause.

### *Is vaginal dryness common in cancer survivors?*

Sexual problems are reported in up to 90% of cancer survivors and may result in sexual avoidance patterns and behaviors that affect quality of life. Vaginal dryness may be one of these sexual problems or the result of some patterns or behaviors. Any of the symptoms experienced by a cancer survivor may be compounded with increased frequency of urinary tract infections.

### *Can vaginal dryness be treated?*

Yes, there are multiple ways to treat vaginal dryness, including both lifestyle changes and topical local management. The goal of treatment is to alleviate symptoms and restore tissue quality. This can be challenging due to hormonal changes resulting from cancer and its treatment but research evidence shows that regular use of moisturizers, including non-hormonal products, are effective for relieving symptoms.

*Moisturizers*

Vaginal moisturizers can improve tissue quality and provide long-term relief for symptoms such as itching irritation and discomfort. They can also be used to help restore vaginal lining and vulvar tissue. By providing a smooth layer of moisture that adheres to the vaginal tissue, moisturizers also improve the vaginal pH. Cancer patients and survivors may need to apply more often than what is recommended on the box to address their symptoms. Moisturizing at least 3 to 5 times per week is ideal; this should include vaginal application as moisturizing external tissues (vulva). Using your fingertip, a small amount should also be applied to the inner vaginal lips, clitoris, and opening to the vagina. Moisturizers should always be applied at bedtime for the best absorption.

Replens	Binds directly to vaginal cells, and has been found to be as effective as vaginal creams.
Emerita Personal Feminine Moisturizer	Paraben-free, all natural ingredients. No mineral oil, petroleum, or animal ingredients. No animal testing. Water-based, completely washable, unscented, flavorless, and non-staining
PrevaLeaf Oasis	Concentrated water-based cream that is pH balanced for the vagina. Paraben- and fragrance-free.
K-Y Liquibeads	Beads release lubricant over several days. Silicone formula.
Good Clean Love: RESTORE	Accurately bio-matches healthy pH, salt balance, and lactobacilli action, petroleum, glycerin, and paraben free, condom compatible, vegan

Hyalo- GYN	Hyaluronic acid based moisturizer, found to be comparably effective to vaginal estrogen. Colorless, odorless, transparent, aqueous, hydrating gel. It acts as a moisturizer and lubricant. May also be applied externally to moisturize vulva.
Revaree	Hyaluronic acid based vaginal insert, found to be comparably effective to vaginal estrogen. Relieves vaginal dryness, itching and discomfort..

## Topical Treatment Options

### *Lubricants*

Lubricants can enhance a woman's own lubrication and temporarily relieve vaginal and vulvar dryness during sexual activity. Using lubricant is a way to reduce friction and protect against sexual pain by decreasing pressure on the genitals. Water- or silicone-based lubricants are recommended. Caution should be taken with warming or scented lubricants, as they may irritate estrogen-deprived vaginal tissue. For women who are sensitive to yeast infections, they should avoid glycerin-based products which break down to a sugar and promote yeast growth, or flavored lubricants, which may have sugar in them. Avoid petroleum-based products because they can be irritating, damage condoms and diaphragms and can increase risk of infection.

***Water-based:*** These lubricants are widely available and with the greatest range of textures (e.g., gel, cream, lotion). They may get sticky quickly but you can add a spray of water to revive the slickness. Water-based products are easy to clean off, safe with condoms, and safe to use internally, externally, and with vibrators and dilators.

***Silicone-based:*** These lubricants offer a slicker feel and do not get sticky. They are not water-soluble, which means they are not absorbed by skin and therefore last longer than water-based lubricants. When used externally, they must be washed off the skin. They do not generally cause irritation or allergic reactions. Silicone-based lubes should not be used with silicone/ rubber toys or silicone dilators because they can break down the rubber over time.

***Hybrid-Lubes:*** There are lubricants that are a mix of both water-and silicone-base. They have a natural feel and also last longer because of the silicone. Like other silicone-based lubes, hybrid lubes should not be used with silicone sex toys or dilators

We recommend staying away from Oil-based lubricants such as petroleum jelly and mineral oil because they can cause vaginal irritation and can damage latex condoms and rubber sex toys.

## Lubricants

<b>Water-based</b>	
Slippery stuff	Formerly known as Femglide, paraben and glycerin free
Astroglide (gel, liquid)	Available in preservative-free (methylparaben free) and glycerin-free (for diabetics)
K-Y Jelly or Silk-E or UltraGel	Compatible with latex condoms
Good Clean Love: Almost Naked Organic Lubricant	95% organic ingredients, glycerin free, paraben/petrochemical free, vegan, condom compatible
Pre-seed	Marketed as “fertility friendly” because it mimics fertile fluids and supports sperm quality. Less irritating than other lubricants.
Sliquid	Organic, glycerin and paraben free, botanically infused, vegan
Pjur med: Sensitive glide	Glycerin, paraben, and preservative free
PINK Water	Unscented, hypoallergenic, paraben free, glycerin free, flavor free, safe for all toys
<b>Silicone- based</b>	
ID Millennium	Less drying than other lubricants. Can be used with latex condoms
Pjur med: Premium glide	Can be used with latex condoms
PINK Silicone	Unscented, glycerin free, paraben free, Can be used with condoms
KY True Feel	Long lasting, natural feel, contains: glycerin, propylene glycol, maltodextrin, honey, methylparaben, sucralose