

Vaginal Symptoms from Cancer Therapy

Key Points

- ❖ Causes: Some cancer treatments lower the amount of estrogen in your body. Low estrogen levels can cause vaginal dryness, irritation, soreness, and pain during intercourse.
- ❖ You can use vaginal moisturizers to replace normal vaginal secretions. vaginal moisturizers must be used routinely to be effective.
- ❖ Vaginal lubricants can be used during intercourse to decrease friction and irritation. Vaginal lubricants only provide temporary relief of symptoms and are not meant to provide long-term vaginal moisture.

Your cancer treatment may cause changes in your genitourinary tract, which includes the vagina, urethra, and bladder. Radiation, surgery, chemotherapy, and hormonal therapy can lead to low estrogen levels. Low estrogen causes thinning, drying, and/or inflammation and subsequent atrophy of the tissues of the external urinary tract, vulvar area, and vagina. There are several ways to help manage these side effects. In this document, we will provide options for managing these symptoms without using hormones.

Symptoms









- Vaginal dryness, itching, and/or irritation
- Pain during intercourse
- Painful urination
- Frequent urinary tract infections

Vaginal Moisturizers

Vaginal moisturizers are used to replace the natural secretions of the vagina. You must use them regularly to be effective. These moisturizers are available in the form of a vaginal gel/cream or a vaginal suppository. Vaginal moisturizers are generally categorized as being hyaluronic acid-based (HA) or non-hyaluronic acid-based (non-HA). HA moisturizers have been shown to be just as effective as, and in some studies more effective than, vaginal estrogen at improving vaginal symptoms. One strategy for improving vaginal dryness is to begin using an HA moisturizer every 3 days. If additional relief is needed, a non-HA moisturizer can be added on opposite days.

The list of vaginal moisturizers on the following page has a few examples of moisturizer options. **This list is not comprehensive and Roswell Park does not endorse the use of any specific brand or product.** The decision on which moisturizer to use often depends on cost and the form of the vaginal moisturizer (gel vs. suppository).

Vaginal Moisturizers

Product	Image	Hyaluronic Acid?	Dosage Form	Cost per month
HyaloGYN https://hyalogyn.com		Yes	Gel & Suppository	\$30 - 35
Revaree https://try.hellobonafide.com		Yes	Suppository	\$42 - 62
CVS Moisturizing Vaginal Suppositories https://www.cvs.com/shop/cvs-health-vaginal-moisturizing-suppositories-10-ct-prodid-833306		Yes	Suppository	\$19
Good Clean Love https://goodcleanlove.com/collections/shop-all-vaginal-care/products/restore-moisturizing-vaginal-gel		Yes	Gel	\$20 - 25
Replens https://www.replens.com/Products/Replens-Long-Lasting-Moisturizer/		No	Gel	\$25 - 35
Luvena https://luvenacare.com/products/luvena-vaginal-moisturizer-and-lubricant		No	Gel	\$22 - 35
K-Y Liquibeads Vaginal Moisturizer https://www.k-y.com/lubes/liquibeads		No	Suppository	\$20 - 30
AH! YES Vaginal Moisturizer https://www.ahyes.org/products/ah-yes-vm-natural-vaginal-moisturizer		No	Gel	\$15 - 20

Vaginal Lubricants

Vaginal lubricants can be used during intercourse to reduce friction and irritation. Lubricants only provide temporary relief and will not provide long-term vaginal moisture. Lubricants can be water, silicone, or glycerin-based.

- **Water-based** lubricants do not stain clothes or sheets, do not damage sex toys or dilators, are low priced, and easy to wash off the body.
- **Silicone-based** lubricants never dry up, can be used with condoms, non-silicone sex toys or dilators, but can cause irritation.
- **Glycerin-based** lubricants can stain fabrics, cannot be used with latex condoms, diaphragms, or sex toys, and can cause irritation.

Both lubricants and moisturizers can be purchased over the counter and are found in the feminine hygiene aisle of most drug stores. **Stay away from fragrances, essential oils, cooking oils, body oils, or other “natural” additives** that may cause irritation, inflammation, or bacterial growth. When in doubt, ask your health care provider for their recommendations on lubricants, moisturizers, or any supplement.

Vaginal Dilators

Vaginal dilators are used to stretch the vagina and train the muscles to relax and allow for movement. The use of dilators can be helpful for those who have had:

- radiation to the pelvis
- vaginal shortening as a result of surgery or medication
- tightening of the vaginal walls
- pain with sex and/or penetration

Vaginal dilators come in a variety of shapes, colors and materials which all have their own pros and cons. For more information about vaginal dilators and how and when to use them, **please contact your health care team for their personalized recommendations.**

How Your Healthcare Team Can Help

Your healthcare team is a wealth of information. If they don't have the answers to your questions, they can make referrals and find other resources that may help. Specialists such as gynecologists, sexual therapists, and social workers can help you better understand your condition and how to manage it. Ask your health care team what is available and if they can make an appropriate referral for you.