Feminine health during menopause and beyond

Are some things in your life just not as great as they used to be?
Painful sex, itchiness, leaky bladder?
Don’t despair - there are treatments available.

A drop in oestrogen levels may be the problem
If you have gone through or are going through
• menopause
• surgery to remove ovary
• some cancer treatments
you are likely to be feeling the effects of declining oestrogen levels.
This drop in hormone production can play havoc with your quality of life, sex life and bladder function.

Menopause & post-menopause
Menopause is more common in women aged 40 to 58 years.
It can also occur if you have had your ovaries removed, known as surgical menopause.
During menopause the body makes less and less oestrogen (known as a female sex hormone) and by the time you are post-menopausal you will be making very little oestrogen.
During and after menopause you may experience symptoms, such as hot flushes and night sweats.
It is common to experience dryness and irritation of the vagina and vulva skin.

Your quality of life and wellbeing is important
Reduced oestrogen levels lead to long-term changes to your body, but this doesn’t mean you have to live with the discomfort of GSM (genitourinary syndrome of menopause).
Urogenital symptoms may not reduce and may get worse over time, unless they are treated.
This can negatively affect your quality of life, sexual satisfaction and relationships.

How will your doctor help?
Your doctor will start by asking you some questions about your symptoms and health history, such as when you stopped having periods.
They may recommend a blood test to check your hormone levels.
Your doctor will help you understand and manage your symptoms and explain how medications work and any possible side effects.
What treatment is available?
If the doctor confirms you have GSM due to oestrogen deficiency there’s a number of lifestyle changes you can make and treatments that can help.

Lifestyle changes to minimise vaginal irritation:

- Wear cotton underwear and avoid tight-fitting underwear or garments that cause sweating.
- Use fragrance-free or low-allergenic washing products.
- Avoid using products that may irritate or dry your skin.

GSM can’t be “cured” in the way that some conditions can be cured with medication, but effective ongoing treatments are available.

Non-hormonal treatments
Non-hormonal treatments such as water-based lubricants and vaginal moisturisers can relieve dryness and reduce discomfort during intercourse.

Hormonal treatments
Local oestrogen therapy using a cream or soft waxy tablet (called a pessary), that you put inside your vagina at night, is the preferred way to treat GSM.

In New Zealand Ovestin® is prescribed for post-menopausal women. Ovestin® is an oestrogen product used for relief of symptoms and can be prescribed by your doctor.

GSM
“Genitourinary syndrome of menopause” (GSM) is also known as “vaginal atrophy” or “vulvovaginal atrophy” (VVA).

These terms all mean the same thing, and include physical symptoms such as: a feeling of dryness, burning, itching or general irritation in the genital area

Signs & symptoms

Itchiness. The skin around your vagina is more sensitive and more likely to itch or burn when irritated. This can make wearing overly tight clothing uncomfortable.

Pain when you have sex. Compared to before menopause, your vagina is smaller, drier and less likely to become lubricated during sex. Also, the skin around your vagina is thinner and this may lead to discomfort with intercourse.

Urinary problems. The lack of oestrogen also affects your bladder and urinary system. This can lead to urinary frequency (the feeling of having to go to the toilet more often), incontinence and an increased risk of infection.

Vaginal discharge. There may be an unpleasant discharge, which could be due to an infection or changes in the vaginal pH balance.

You are not alone!

You may be experiencing symptoms of “genitourinary syndrome of menopause” (GSM) such as feeling of dryness, burning, itching or general irritation in the genital area.

These symptoms are common and usually get worse if left untreated, so it is worth overcoming any embarrassment and speaking to a health professional.

Your doctor or pharmacist understands how difficult it can be to ask about GSM, but they talk to women every day about personal health issues, and are there to help you.

Ovestin® (oestradiol) Cream 1mg/g is a fully funded Prescription Medicine for the treatment of oestrogen deficiency of the vagina and/or urinary tract. Ovestin® cream has risks and benefits. Use strictly as directed. If symptoms persist or if you have side effects see your doctor, pharmacist or healthcare professional. Ask your doctor if Ovestin® cream is right for you. Normal doctors and prescription charges apply.

Please see the Consumer Medicine Information at www.medsafe.govt.nz Ovestin® cream is a registered trademark of Aspen Pharmacare. C/O Healthcare Logistics, Auckland. TAPS PP8743-16OC.