

Low-Dose Vaginal Estrogen Therapy

1. Why should I use vaginal estrogen?
2. What is intravaginal estrogen therapy?
3. Is local estrogen therapy safe for me?
4. Which preparation is best for me?
5. If I am already on HRT, do I need local estrogen as well?

Why should I use vaginal estrogen?

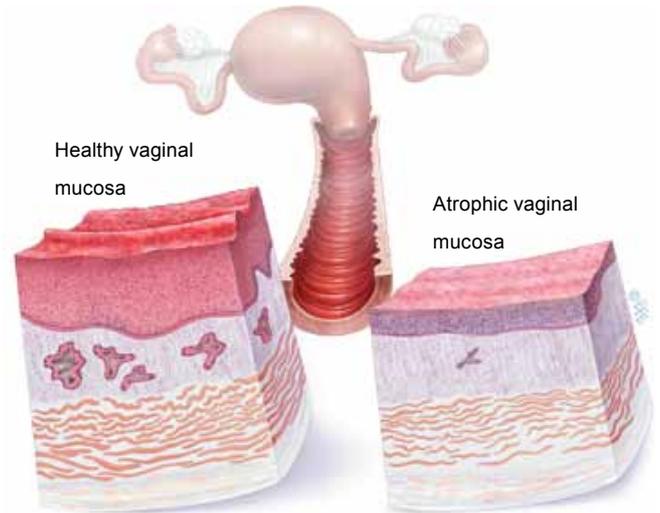
Local estrogen is used to treat urogenital atrophic skin changes. This is a medical term that describes the skin changes that occur in the vagina, urethra (tube from the bladder) and vulva when the ovaries no longer produce estrogen after menopause. This can lead to changes in the acidity of the vagina leading to the skin becoming dry, thinned, sore and less lubricated.

Women who have vaginal atrophic change can present with discomfort or pain with intercourse, increasing vaginal discharge and irritation, or a burning sensation. The aim of low dose vaginal estrogen is to relieve these symptoms.

The skin changes that take place in the vagina also take place in the water passage (urethra) and in the base of the bladder (the trigone). These changes may result in symptoms of urinary frequency or urgency and discomfort passing urine. You may also be more prone to frequent urinary infections or symptoms of infection. Local intravaginal estrogen can help to relieve these symptoms.

What is intravaginal estrogen therapy?

This involves estrogen being applied directly to the vagina, where it works locally to improve the quality of the skin by normalizing its acidity and making it thicker and better lubricated. The advantage of using local therapy rather than systemic therapy (i.e. Hormone Replacement Therapy as tablets or patches, etc) is that much lower doses of hormone can be used to achieve good effects in the vagina, while minimizing effects on other organs such as the breast or uterus. Vaginal estrogen comes in several forms as vaginal tablet, cream or gel or in a ring pessary.



Is local estrogen therapy safe for me?

Vaginal estrogen preparations act locally on the vaginal skin, and only a very tiny amount is absorbed into the bloodstream. They work in a similar way to hand or face cream. There is minimal absorption and they are therefore perfectly safe. If you have had breast cancer and have persistent troublesome symptoms which aren't settling with vaginal moisturisers and lubricants, local estrogen treatment may be a possibility, but consultation with your oncologist should take place first.

Which preparation is best for me?

Your doctor will be able to advise you on this but most women tolerate all forms of topical estrogen. Studies have shown that all preparations are equally as effective in relieving symptoms.

If I am already on HRT do I need local estrogen as well?

Not usually, but if you continue to have vaginal symptoms despite using HRT, your doctor may prescribe vaginal estrogen as well. This is especially common if you are on a very low dose of HRT. In this way you can improve your vaginal symptoms without the need for a higher dose of HRT. Vaginal lubricants such as KY jelly may also be helpful if your main symptom is vaginal dryness during intercourse.