

## Gynaecology Department

# Low dose vaginal oestrogen therapy

### Why should I use local vaginal oestrogen?

Local oestrogen is used to treat “urogenital atrophic skin changes”. This is a medical term that describes the skin changes that occur in the vagina, vulva and urethra (tube that carries pee out of the body) when the ovaries no longer produce oestrogen after menopause. These changes can lead to changes in the acidity of the vagina. This can result in the skin becoming dry, thinned, sore and less lubricated.

Women who have vaginal atrophy may have:

- discomfort or pain during intercourse
- increasing vaginal discharge and irritation
- a burning sensation

The aim of low dose vaginal oestrogen is to relieve these symptoms.

The skin changes that take place in the urethra and in the base of the bladder, or the trigone, may result in symptoms of:

- urinary frequency or urgency
- discomfort passing urine
- you may also be more prone to urinary tract infections

Local intravaginal oestrogen can help to relieve these symptoms.



## Patient Information

### **What is intravaginal oestrogen therapy?**

This involves oestrogen being applied directly to the vagina. Here, it works locally to improve the quality of the skin. Oestrogen does this by normalising the vagina's acidity and making it thicker and better lubricated.

The advantage of using local therapy rather than systemic therapy, such as hormone tablets or patches, is that much lower doses of hormone can be used to relieve symptoms in the vagina, while minimising the effects on other organs such as the breast or uterus. Vaginal oestrogen comes in several forms such as vaginal tablets, creams or gel or in a ring pessary.

### **Is local oestrogen therapy safe for me?**

Vaginal oestrogen preparations act locally on the vaginal skin, and very little, if any, oestrogen is absorbed into the bloodstream. They work in a similar way to hand or face cream.

If you have had breast cancer and have persistent troublesome symptoms which aren't improving with vaginal moisturisers and lubricants, local oestrogen treatment may be a possibility, but you should consult with your oncologist 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 oestrogen. Studies have shown that all preparations are as effective as each other at relieving symptoms.

### **If I am already on HRT do I need local oestrogen as well?**

Not usually, but if you continue to have vaginal symptoms despite using HRT, your doctor may prescribe vaginal oestrogen 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.

## **Further Information**

If you have any questions or would like further information, you can telephone the **Gynaecology Department on 024 7696 7000**.

## Patient Information

Alternatively, you may also find the web link below helpful.

### **International Urogynaecological Association:**

<http://www.iuga.org/?page=patientinfo>

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 7000 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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#### **Document History**

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