

Like clockwork

from Dr. Laura Corio, M.D.

WOMEN'S HEALTH ISSUES

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Vaginal Atrophy

There are so many things our mothers and girlfriends will never talk about. One of those things? Vaginal atrophy. As a woman goes through perimenopause and beyond, estrogen levels decline, leading to thinning of the vaginal tissues, as well as the bladder lining and the vulvar skin. The opening to the vagina becomes smaller and tighter. There's a decrease in vaginal secretions and therefore an increase in dryness. I'm not embarrassed to speak freely about this topic and feel my patients need to be educated so they aren't caught off guard when it happens to them.

It's Common

Between 75 and 90 percent of postmenopausal women experience vaginal atrophy. This problem can contribute to sexual issues. Intercourse may become painful. A woman may lose her sense of pleasure when touched in the clitoral, vulvar and vaginal area. Many women then will avoid sex due to discomfort. Who wants to have sex if it's only going to hurt? Beyond that it can also be a contributory factor in urinary tract infections and vaginal infections.

Basic Treatment

How does a woman approach this problem? First of all, you must be able to speak freely about sex to me. I can't help you with a problem if I don't know about it. Typically, I will recommend a trial of vaginal lubricants and moisturizers to help vaginal dryness and painful sex. Replens, a non-hormonal moisturizer for the vagina, can be very helpful for vaginal symptoms and can be safely used by women before we try hormone therapy. I may advise you to try olive oil as well. How's that for a simple solution?

Hormone Therapy

If none of the above helps, prescription vaginal estrogen therapy is another option. With estrogen, you must treat both the inner, deep vaginal skin and the opening and lips of the vagina; I often give patients estrogen-containing vaginal creams, suppositories and rings. These all help increase vaginal lubrication and vaginal blood flow and decrease pain on intercourse. They're extremely low dose and absorbed only in the vaginal and bladder tissues so they are safe; however, if you experience vaginal bleeding, you have to let me know immediately! I've found that some women have success using testosterone cream and estrogen for the vulvar area and the opening of the vagina. If all else fails, we may try bioidentical hormone replacement therapy (HRT). But 10 to 40 percent of women on HRT still have symptoms of vaginal atrophy and require vaginal estrogen.

Staying Active

Women who continue to have sex experience less vaginal atrophy. Sex improves blood flow and lubrication and helps prevent the vaginal opening from narrowing. But at the first sign of painful sex, please talk to me. Early treatment lowers the likelihood of future problems.



Dealing With Atrophy

You must be able to speak freely about sex to me. I can't help you with a problem if I don't know about it.



Dr. Corio's Resources

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PEARLS

The Question: What does normal vaginal discharge look and smell like?

Dr. Corio Says: Normal vaginal discharge is clear or can be white, it may be a little thick, and it should not have an odor. Some women will produce more vaginal discharge than others will and it this may depend on the hormones in their system. What I call an abnormal vaginal discharge is if it's itching, burning, or has a fishy odor. If you experience any of those symptoms, you need to make an appointment and get it checked out.

The Question: Is it normal to experience pain during sex?

Dr. Corio Says: Women should not experience pain during intercourse. If you're having this problem, you need come in and talk about it. There are various diseases that may be the culprit such as vulvitis, vestibulitis, or vulvodynia, or even something called endometriosis. Vulvodynia or vestibulitis can be pain right at the opening of the vagina when a woman is first starting to have intercourse with her partner. Deep thrusting could be a pain related to endometriosis. Either way, this is not a normal phenomenon and needs to be checked out.

The Question: Is it normal to experience pain during sex?

Dr. Corio Says: There are natural supplements that a woman can take to increase her sex drive. One of them is ginkgo biloba, which has been shown to increase blood flow to the genital area as well as enhance orgasm. Then there is maca root, which is also shown to increase libido. A trip to any drugstore or health food store will uncover many other supplements that claim to increase libido or some other aspect of sex. But you have to be very careful about choosing supplements and taking them if you're on any prescription drugs. And of course, some of them are a scam; buy them and it's like flushing your money down the toilet. Please, always check with me first if you're unsure about a supplement or want advice on what might work best for you.

Doctor & Office Hours

Doctor's Hours

Monday	12:00 PM-6:00 PM
Tuesday	9:00 AM-3:00 PM
Wednesday	9:30 AM-2:30 PM
Thursday	8:00 AM-2:00 PM

Office Hours

Monday	10:00 AM-5:00 PM
Tuesday – Friday	9:00 AM-4:00 PM

Make an Appointment

Call 646-422-0730 during our normal office hours.



News Flash

Women with low sex drives reported greater sexual satisfaction after taking a placebo, according to new psychology research from The University of Texas at Austin and Baylor College of Medicine. The researchers found that opening a new line of communication about sex can have a positive effect in many women with low libidos. The study analyzed data from 200 women over a 12-week period. Fifty of those women, ages 35-55, were randomly chosen to receive a placebo instead of a drug treatment for low sexual arousal. One in three of the women who took a placebo showed an overall improvement including an increased frequency of satisfying sexual encounters and more stimulation during sexual activity. Conclusion: A woman's expectations to improve sexually can have a substantial positive effect on her sexual well-being without any actual drug treatment. Bravo!

Sources for newsletter: aolhealth.com, uptodate.com, sciencedaily.com