

PATIENT INFORMATION

Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM)



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What is GSM and what are the symptoms ?

Genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM) is defined as all menopausal symptoms related to your reproductive parts (womb & vagina) and urinary system (bladder and urethra). See *diagram on back page*

The syndrome occurs due to natural changing levels of hormones in your body, commonly occurring during or after menopause.

Symptoms of GSM may include :

- Vaginal dryness, and burning
- Vaginal discharge
- Itching down below
- Burning when you pee
- Having times when you suddenly and urgently need to pee
- Getting Urinary Tract Infections (water infections)
- Bleeding down below after sex
- Uncomfortable sex
- Lack of natural lubrication during sex

- Shortening and tightening of the vaginal canal

Do not use perfumed products down below

Some perfumed products will irritate the skin of the vulva and worsen symptoms such as itching and burning down below

Wear cotton (breathable) underwear

Wearing tight fitting underwear, preventing the skin around the vagina from breathing and can worsen the symptoms of GSM.

Avoid caffeinated and fizzy drinks

If you have problems with suddenly needing to go to the toilet, and leaking urine, you should avoid drinks that contain caffeine, as well as fizzy drinks

Have regular sexual activity if possible

Research has shown that sex helps to maintain the elasticity of the vaginal walls as well as increasing the blood supply to the vagina. This helps to maintain good health of the vagina.

Do not smoke

Most symptoms of GSM are made worse by smoking. For help quitting smoking, visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/>

Try to reduce your stress levels

Feeling stressed can reduce the amount of moisture in your vagina, worsening symptoms such as vaginal dryness, itching, bleeding and burning.

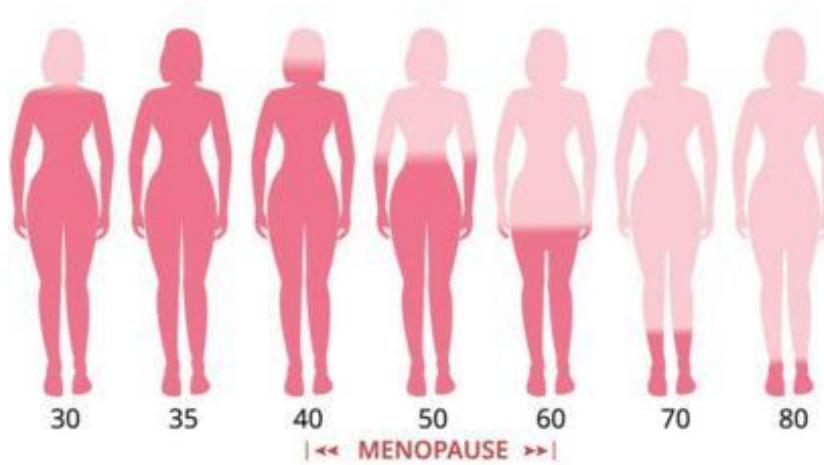
Apply the creams / tablets prescribed to you as regularly as your doctor has discussed with you.

Regular application is needed to help maintain the health of the vagina. Maximum benefit is usually achieved after around 1–3 months, but it can take up to 1 year in some women.

Dry and clean underwear

If you leak urine, try and change your pads or pants regularly in order to keep the area dry. This will help to stop irritation and improve symptoms such as itching and burning down-below.

What causes Genitourinary syndrome of menopause?



In women, oestrogen helps to protect the health of the vagina. Oestrogen levels tend to peak at 35 years of age and decrease afterwards.

The picture below shows how much oestrogen a woman has (on average) as they grow older.

How is GSM treated?

Usually, your doctor will offer you several medications to combat your symptoms, including:

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

This is a tablet taken daily, by mouth, to reduce many symptoms of menopause. Symptoms of GSM will persist in 10–25% of women who take HRT.

Topical Vaginal Oestrogen

Vaginal oestrogen cream

(Ovestin®, Gynest®) The cream is applied directly into your vagina with an applicator, usually at bedtime.

Typically, women use it daily for one to three weeks and then one to three times a week thereafter. Some women find using the cream a bit messy so prefer the vaginal suppository (tablet) form.

Vaginal oestrogen tablet/suppository (Vagifem®):

A disposable applicator is used to insert the tablet into your vagina. It is often used daily for the first two weeks and then twice a week thereafter.



Other Lubricants and creams

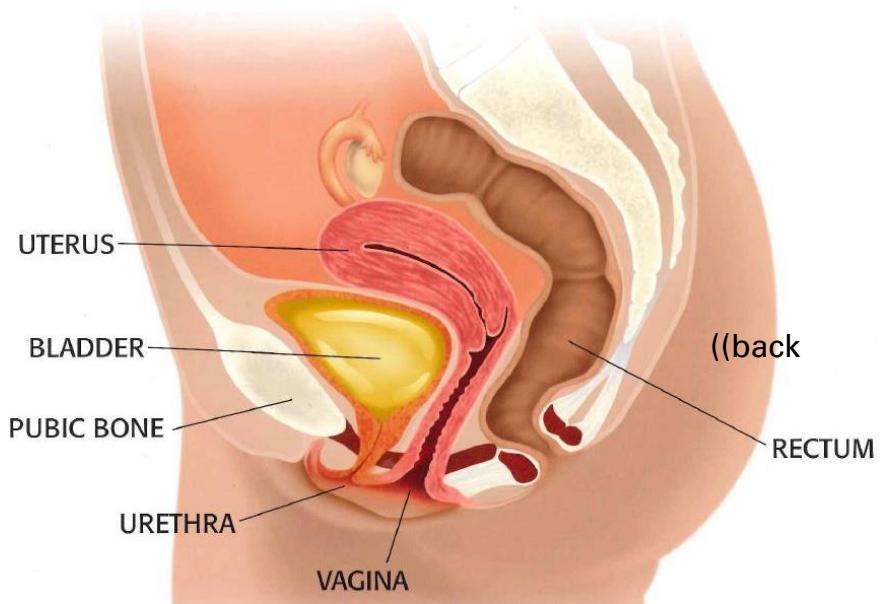
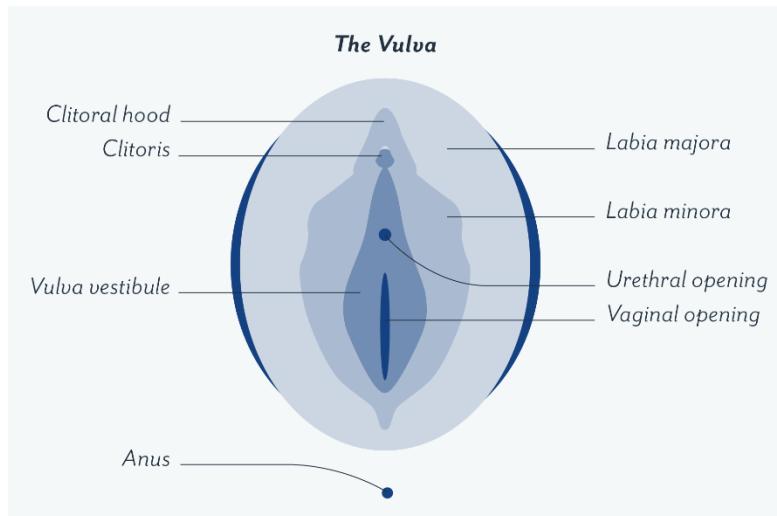
If oestrogen is not suitable for you, a moisturizer without oestrogen (Replens® YES-VM®, YES-OB®, Hyalofemme®) can be applied to the inside of the vagina instead. Women with a history of breast cancer may consider using this option instead.

There are also lubricants which are applied to the vagina just before sex, to reduce discomfort (YES-OB, YES-WB (water based), SYLK).



Educational anatomy of the vulva and vagina

OVARY



During your contact with us, it is important that you are happy with your care and treatment. Please speak to a member of staff and/or the ward/department Sister/Charge Nurse if you have questions or concerns.

MATRON

A Matron is also available during the hours of 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. During these periods, ward/department staff can contact Matron to arrange to meet with you. Out of hours, a Senior Nurse can be contacted via the ward/department to deal with any concerns you may have.

INFECTION CONTROL REQUEST

Preventing infections is a crucial part of our patients' care. To ensure that our standards remain high our staff have regular infection prevention and control training and their practice is monitored in the workplace. We ask patients and visitors to assist us in preventing infections by cleaning their hands at regular intervals and informing staff of areas within the hospital that appear soiled.

As a patient there may be times that you are unsure whether a staff member has cleaned their hands; if in doubt please ask the staff member and they will be only too happy to put your mind at ease by cleaning their hands so that you can see them.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

ANY CONDITION SPECIFIC DANGER SIGNALS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

CONTACT INFORMATION IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CONDITION

- Your own GP

OTHER USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS/CONTACTS:

NHS 111

Stop Smoking Helpline (Sefton) – 0300 100 1000

Stop Smoking Helpline (West Lancashire) – 0800 328 6297

**Please call 01704 704714 if you need
this leaflet in an alternative format**

Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust

Ormskirk & District General Hospital
Wigan Road, Ormskirk, L39 2AZ
Tel: (01695) 577111

Southport & Formby District General Hospital
Town Lane, Kew, Southport, PR8 6PN
Tel: (01704) 547471

FOR APPOINTMENTS

Telephone (01695) 656680
Email soh-tr.appointments@nhs.net

Please remember to complete the **attached Friends and Family Test**.

Alternatively, you can complete the *Friends and Family Test* on-line by going to: southportandormskirk.nhs.uk/FFT
Thank you

Author: Meena Legg / Miss Aleem

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