

Improving comfort and well-being with Vaginal Oestrogen for Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM)

Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM) is characterised by the thinning and shrinking of vulva, vagina, urethra, and bladder tissues due to oestrogen deficiency. Common symptoms include vaginal dryness, irritation, frequent urination, and urinary tract infections.

NICE Guidelines recommendations

- Vaginal oestrogen is recommended for women with urogenital atrophy, even for those on systemic HRT and continue treatment for as long as needed to relieve symptoms.
- Consider vaginal oestrogen for women with urogenital atrophy in whom systemic HRT is contraindicated, after seeking advice from a healthcare professional with expertise in menopause.
- If vaginal oestrogen does not relieve symptoms of urogenital atrophy, consider increasing the dose after seeking advice from a healthcare professional with expertise in menopause.
- Explain to women with urogenital atrophy that:
 - symptoms often come back when treatment is stopped
 - adverse effects from vaginal oestrogen are very rare
 - they should report unscheduled vaginal bleeding to their GP
- Advise women with vaginal dryness that moisturisers and lubricants can be used alone or in addition to vaginal oestrogen.
- Do not offer routine monitoring of endometrial thickness during treatment for urogenital atrophy.

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Treatment Options for Urogenital Atrophy

1. Vaginal Moisturisers and Lubricants

- Yes VM™
- Sylk™
- Replens™
- Regelle™
- Vagisil™

2. Vaginal Oestrogen

- Nightly every night for 2 weeks, then reduce to 2-3 times per week according to severity
- No restriction on duration of use – can be used for decades if necessary
- Pessaries, gels, creams – depending on personal choice and
- Preference

Trade name	Active Ingredient	Form	Dose	Administration
Vagifem™	Estradiol	Vaginal tablet	10mcg	Single-use Applicator
Vagirus™	Estradiol	Vaginal tablet	10mcg	Multi-use Applicator
Blisse!™	Estriol	Vaginal gel	50mcg	Reusable Plunger
Imvaggis™	Estriol	Vaginal pessary	0.03mg	Manual Insertion
Ovestin™	Estriol	Vaginal cream	0.5mg	Multi-use Applicator

3. Alternative non-hormonal treatments

- Prasterone (DHEA; hormone precursor)
- Ospemifene (oral SERM) – not yet licensed in Ireland
- Laser surgery – insufficient evidence for benefit

Patient Guidance: Women should be informed about potential symptom recurrence, rare adverse effects, and the importance of reporting unscheduled vaginal bleeding.

Potential Side Effects of Vaginal Oestrogen

- A burning vaginal feeling is a common adjustment reaction in the first few weeks - counselling patients in advance is important as otherwise they may suspect they are allergic to the product.
- Other side effects can include headache, abdominal pain and bright-pink vaginal spotting, but these normally improve in the first few months of treatment.
- It can take up to 3 months to work fully.
- Vaginal oestrogen does not have the same risks as other types of HRT, because the dose is low and systemic absorption is minimal.
- The only absolute contraindication to vaginal oestrogen is current active breast cancer and undiagnosed vaginal bleeding. Women presenting with new abnormal vaginal bleeding should be referred as per local post-menopausal bleeding guidelines.

Managing vulvovaginal atrophy in symptomatic women with previous breast cancer

- Vaginal moisturisers should be first line management
- If refractory symptoms, ultra-low dose topical oestrogen can be considered.
- Topical oestrogen should be avoided in the presence of an aromatase inhibitor.
- If a woman is using an aromatase inhibitor, switching to tamoxifen may ameliorate symptoms – discussion with oncologist is necessary for management of GSM in these cases.
- Ospemifene can be used safely in women with previous breast cancer (From *British Menopause Society*).

PLEASE NOTE:

- Systemic HRT only improves GSM in around 25% of users; always consider adding vaginal oestrogen if symptoms persist.
- Many women will require 3 months of treatment before their symptoms have improved sufficiently to allow for comfortable cervical screening.

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