

Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM)

PATIENT FACT SHEET

What is GSM?

Genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM), previously known as vaginal atrophy or atrophic vaginitis is a collection of physical symptoms that may occur in the vulva, vagina, urethra and bladder after menopause. These symptoms may cause physical discomfort and can affect the vagina, urinary system and impact on sexual health.

What causes GSM?

GSM is a chronic condition caused by the body decreasing its production of the hormone oestrogen in the years leading up to menopause, during menopause and following menopause.

It is estimated that up to 45% of postmenopausal women may be affected by GSM, but the conditions often stays unreported and untreated.

Symptoms of GSM

Symptoms of GSM may involve changes to the vagina or urinary system and can include dryness, burning and irritation, discomfort and pain with intercourse, discharge as well as urinary urgency and recurrent urinary tract infections.

Unlike other symptoms of menopause such as hot flushes which tend to decrease over time, GSM can persist and recur post-menopause.

Sexual Health

With reduced oestrogen in the body, the vagina loses its elasticity and the vaginal walls can become thin and dry. For some women, GSM can make intercourse painful. This discomfort can inhibit orgasm and lead to a reduced interest in sex.

Regular sexual activity, with or without a partner can help improve tissue function and comfort during intercourse.

Urinary symptoms

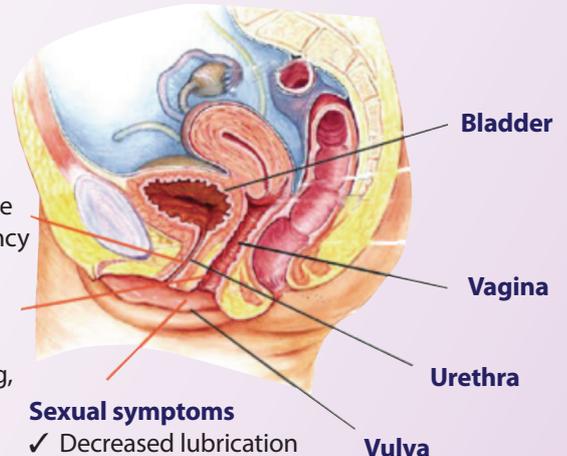
- ✓ Pain passing urine
- ✓ Frequency, urgency

Genital symptoms

- ✓ Dryness
- ✓ Irritation, burning, itching

Sexual symptoms

- ✓ Decreased lubrication
- ✓ Discomfort or pain
- ✓ Bleeding after sex
- ✓ Decreased arousal, orgasm or desire



Urinary Symptoms

Lack of oestrogen can also affect pH in the vagina, making the vaginal environment less acidic than it previously was. As a result, the risk of bacterial infection can increase, leading to an increased risk of urinary tract infections.

Management of GSM

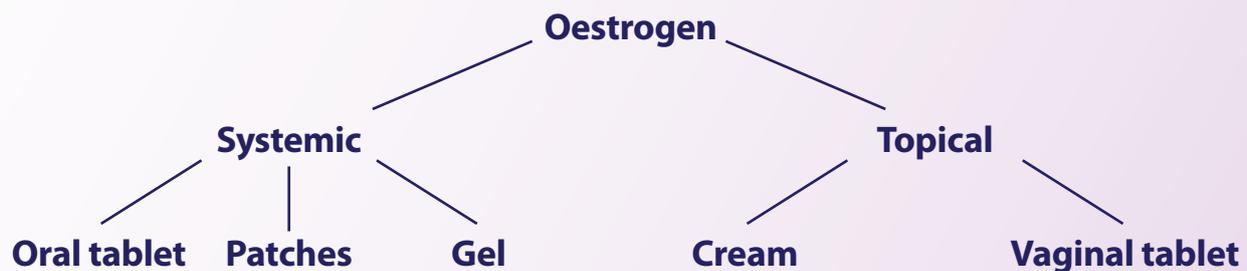
Effective treatments are available. Reduced oestrogen levels may result in long-term changes to your body, but it doesn't mean you have to live with the discomfort of GSM.

Lifestyle changes can help to minimise vaginal irritation:

- ✓ Wear cotton underwear and avoid tight-fitting underwear or garments that cause sweating
- ✓ Use fragrance-free or low-allergenic washing products
- ✓ Avoid products and activities that may irritate or dry the skin

Non-hormonal treatments such as water-based lubricants and vaginal moisturisers can relieve itching and reduce discomfort during intercourse. Speak to your pharmacist for advice and recommendations.

Hormonal treatments: Oestrogen therapy is available in a number of dosage forms and can be given systemically or locally. All hormonal treatments require a prescription. Your doctor can help you decide if treatment is appropriate, and which treatment is suitable for you.



This factsheet has been produced by Aspen Australia and is of a general nature only. It is not intended to replace the need for consultation with your doctor. If you have further questions about genitourinary syndrome of Menopause (GSM) or its treatment, please speak to your healthcare professional.

References: 1. Portman D et al. *Menopause* 2014;21:10. 2. Lindahl S. *International Journal of Women's Health* 2014;6. 3. Rahn D et al. *Obstet Gynecol* 2014;124:1147-56 4. North American Menopause Society. Management of symptomatic vulvovaginal atrophy: 2013 position statement of The North American Menopause Society *Menopause* 2013; 20:9:888-902. 5. Australasian Menopause Society. February 2015. Genito-urinary syndrome of menopause Information Sheet. https://www.menopause.org.au/images/stories/infosheets/docs/AMS_Genito_urinary_syndrome_of_menopause Accessed Aug 2015. 6. Womens Health Queensland Wide Inc 2011. Aging down under. <http://www.womhealth.org.au/conditions-and-treatments/ageing-down-under> Accessed Aug 2015.

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