

# Vaginal Health Changes - Perimenopause & Menopause



ESTROGEN IS AN IMPORTANT MODULATOR OF THE VAGINAL MICROBIOME SO PERI-MENOPAUSE AND MENOPAUSE CAN RESULT IN PROFOUND CHANGES IN VAGINAL HEALTH.

Vaginal health is very dependent on the microbial makeup of the vagina. A healthy vagina is associated with low microbial diversity that is dominated by Lactobacilli species. Lactobacilli species produce lactic acid and hydrogen peroxide which help keep vaginal pH in the healthy range of 3.8 to 4.2 which prevents the overgrowth of potential pathogens.

In perimenopause there can be large fluctuations in your hormones with very high surges of estrogen. This is associated with an increased risk of Candida (thrush).

Menopause, however, is associated with an estrogen decline which is associated with a lowering of the number of Lactobacilli. This increases vaginal pH increasing the risk of colonisation by harmful microorganisms leading to vaginal dysbiosis, inflamed vaginal tissues, discharge with odour and possible burning and itching. For instance, the risk of conditions such as Bacterial Vaginosis may increase in the low estrogen environment.

Estrogen decline is also associated with the Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM) which affects almost 50% of women and may affect more because it's an underdiagnosed condition. Symptoms include vaginal dryness, a thinner and less stretchy vaginal lining making it vulnerable to small tears and pain on intercourse. There can be a loss of clitoral stimulation, decreased touch perception and pelvic floor weakening (Kim et al., 2015). Lower estrogen also causes urinary tract symptoms like pain, urgency, and recurrent infections.

GSM is a progressive condition that can have a serious impact on quality of life and women often don't seek help. Nevertheless, there are many treatments to reduce symptoms, both conventionally and holistically.

## TREATMENTS

### CONVENTIONAL

Local estrogen therapy (Ovestin) can increase the number of Lactobacilli species, reducing pH and thereby reduce this risk of bacterial dysbiosis. It can also improve lubrication, reverse atrophic changes in the vagina and bladder, reducing the risk of UTI's with minimal systemic absorption and a good safety profile (Rosenblum, 2020).

A Pelvic Floor Physiotherapist can help strengthen and rehabilitate pelvic floor muscles, so can assist with urgency and incontinence.

### HOLISTIC

- Lubricants and vaginal moisturisers.
- Fennel oil/lotion - can decrease pH and symptoms of vaginal atrophy (Abedi et al., 2018).
- Probiotics both vaginally and orally can modulate the vaginal microbiome to prevent infections. They can also reduce the symptoms of infections (Kim & Park, 2017).
- Lactulose is a prebiotic carbohydrate which vaginally can stimulate the growth of protective Lactobacilli species without stimulating the growth of problematic bacteria (Collins et al., 2018).

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- D-mannose prophylactically for UTI's (Lenger et al., 2020).
- Herbal – hormone modulation and microbial manipulation.
- Vitamin E pessaries, sea buckthorn oil, vitamin C pessaries.

## CONCLUSION

If you have any of these symptoms, please don't think you have to put up with it. Reach out. I would love to discuss your options with you and help reduce your symptoms.



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