



## What is genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM)?

When a woman goes through menopause, her estrogen levels decrease along with the levels of other steroid hormones. These decreases can lead to changes in certain areas of her body, like the vagina, vulva, and bladder. For example, estrogen helps keep the vagina moist and flexible. But when estrogen levels decline, the vagina can become dry and tight. These hormonal drops can lead to a group of genital and urinary symptoms that are called genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM).

GSM is thought to affect about half of postmenopausal women. Symptoms include:

- Dryness, burning sensations, and irritation in the genital area
- Poor vaginal lubrication during sex, discomfort or pain with intercourse, and impaired sexual function
- An urgent need to urinate, painful urination, or recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs)

Women do not need to have all the symptoms to be diagnosed with GSM, but the symptoms are bothersome and are not caused by another medical condition, such as an infection or allergy.

**GSM is chronic and progressive. It does not get better over time.** However, symptoms can be managed with treatment.

Genitourinary syndrome of menopause is a fairly new term. It was developed in 2014 by experts from the International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health (ISSWSH) and the North American Menopause Society (NAMS). They felt that the term encompassed the genital, sexual, and urinary symptoms related to estrogen decline in ways that previous terms did not.

### How is genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM) treated?

Because genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM) refers to a number of different symptoms, treatment depends on a woman's individual situation. For example, if she is experiencing pain during sex due to vaginal dryness, her options may include lubricants, moisturizers, or low-dose vaginal estrogen treatment. Or, if she has urinary problems, she might try pelvic floor physical therapy.

**Many women don't realize that treatments are available and often symptoms can be easily managed.**

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