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Using Vaginal Estrogen

You have been prescribed a vaginal estrogen preparation to use topically. This prescription is to treat vaginal dryness related to loss of estrogen, or for some women it is to replace estrogen when "crowded out" by high levels of testosterone.

This is a prescription that you can pick up at the pharmacy.

This medication is a low dose hormone prescription. It is different than a lubricant, and different than a vaginal moisturizer. You can think of it like a conditioner.

You do not use it before sexual activity.

The hormonal changes that occur to the vagina also affect the tissue around the opening of the vagina. When a topical estrogen cream is prescribed, often the instructions are to take $\frac{1}{2}$ the dose and apply around the opening of the vagina and the labia (lips) including the clitoris and clitoral hood. The other half of the medication goes into the vagina using the applicator from the pharmacy. You can also use your fingers to insert the cream internally.

If you are beginning the prescription, you will be advised to use it daily for a week, then reducing to twice a week. It takes a few months for the tissue to get back to the thickness it had been before the hormonal change. When your symptoms are gone, often you can then reduce the prescription to once a week. If they reoccur you can then increase again to twice a week.

Prescriptions for inside the vagina are also written for rings (Estring: this is a ring that is placed inside the vagina and releases low dose Estrogen products for three months) or suppositories (Vagifem or custom compounded). These methods deliver estrogen to the vagina internally. Often when a woman uses rings or suppositories internally, she will still benefit from some estrogen cream applied externally.

Compounded Vaginal Estrogens can be made in creams without parabens and propylene glycol, and other chemicals that irritate when cracks or fissures are present, or when there is skin sensitivity. There are bio-identical options for both compounded and non-compounded prescriptions.

Vaginal Estrogens have not been shown to cause an increased risk of breast or endometrial cancer. Use of Vaginal Estrogen and risk of stroke continues to be under study. Studies currently show no increase in the risk of stroke or possible small increase.

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