

Vaginal Estrogen: Information and Instructions

What is estrogen?

Estrogen is a female hormone that regulates many processes in the female body, including maintaining a healthy vaginal pH balance and **flora** (the bacteria that live inside the vagina), and promoting healthy vaginal proteins. During menopause, estrogen production slows down and then stops.

What is local vaginal estrogen therapy?

Local vaginal estrogen therapy helps to decrease vaginal and urinary symptoms associated with menopause. Local vaginal estrogen delivers estrogen directly to the vagina with minimal absorption to the rest of the body. This restores thickness and elasticity to the vaginal lining.

Vaginal estrogen creams are a common form of local vaginal estrogen therapy. Some alternatives to creams include suppositories and ring inserts. These therapies help to normalize the vaginal environment and decrease the risk for urinary tract infections.

Two common name brands of vaginal estrogen cream are Estrace® and Premarin®, but there are a number of generic brands as well. .

What symptoms does vaginal estrogen cream treat?

Vaginal estrogen cream treats the symptoms of menopause that are associated with the genitals and urinary organs, such as vaginal dryness, burning, and itching of the vaginal area. It may reduce symptoms of urinary urgency (the sudden, strong need to urinate) and irritation with urination. Local vaginal

estrogen cream is also the most effective way to prevent urinary tract infections in perimenopausal (just before menopause) and postmenopausal (after menopause) women.

What are the side effects of vaginal estrogen cream?

Side effects are rare and may include headache, breast pain, irregular vaginal bleeding or spotting, stomach cramps or bloating, nausea and vomiting, or hair loss. Some women may also notice vaginal burning, irritation, itching, or discharge.

Estrogen cream has **not** been shown to increase a woman's risk of blood clots or cancer. Oral estrogen pills are a separate topic and may increase these risks.

Are there any reasons I should not use local vaginal estrogen therapy?

If you have a history of breast or endometrial cancer, you should ask your oncologist about your personal risk of cancer recurrence before starting local vaginal estrogen therapy.

How often and when do I use vaginal estrogen cream?

Start out by using the cream every night for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks of daily use, cut back to using the cream 2-4 times per week. It is best to use at bedtime so there is less leakage of the cream.

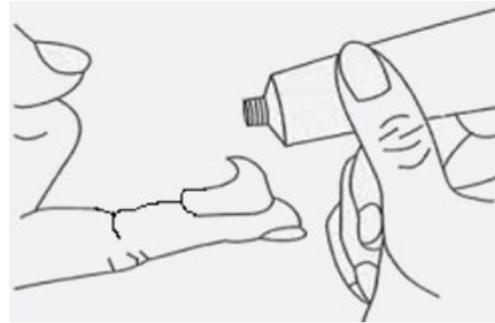
How do I apply vaginal estrogen cream?

Estrogen cream comes in a tube with an applicator. The applicator is used for insertion of the cream into your vagina. Specific instructions for the application of the cream will come with the package insert along with pictures to help you identify how to locate the vagina.

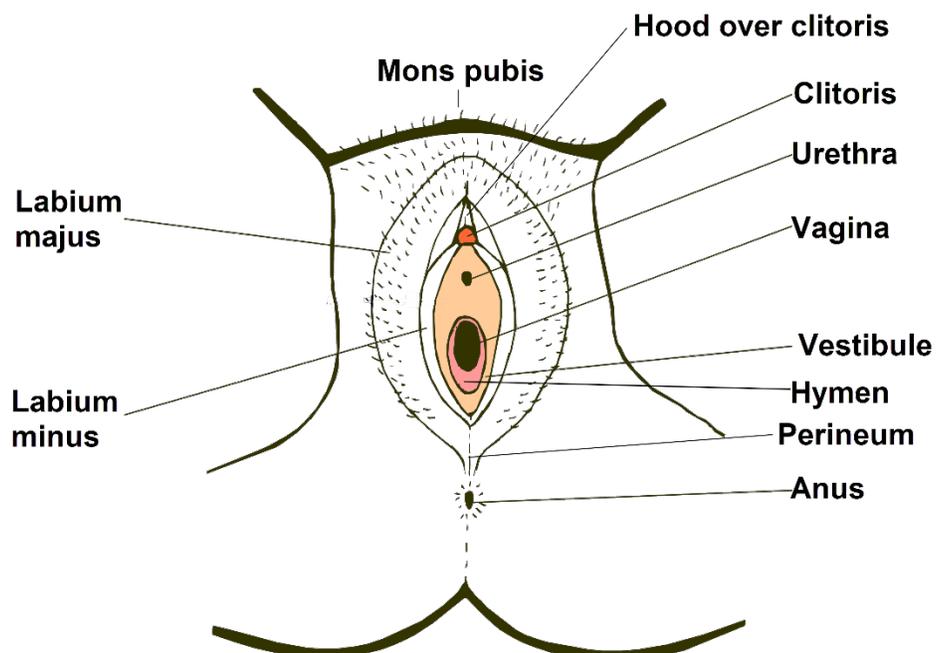
However, the applicator can be uncomfortable for some patients who may prefer to apply the cream using their finger.

How do I apply vaginal estrogen cream with my finger?

1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
2. Remove the cap from the tube and apply a pea-sized amount of cream onto your finger (enough to cover at least $\frac{1}{2}$ of your index finger).



3. Find the vaginal opening. Immediately above the vaginal opening is the urethra (a small opening where urine comes out when you urinate). The urethra may not be as easy to identify as the vagina because the opening is much smaller; however, use the diagram to determine its approximate location.



Miguelferig, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

4. Spread the cream into the vaginal/urethral area. As the cream is spread, make sure to cover the urethral opening and just inside the vagina as this is where most estrogen receptors are located. It is **not** necessary to push the cream high into the vagina.
5. Wash hands with soap and warm water.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by University of Michigan Health for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by U-M Health and for which U-M Health does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan

Author: Jessica Phelps, MD
Reviewers: Amy McAlister, MSA

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised: 10/2022