

## WHAT CAUSES GSM?

GSM is caused by low estrogen levels that are common after menopause. The tissues of the vaginal and urinary areas become thinner and more prone to trauma. The acidity (pH) of the vaginal tissue also decreases. Because acidity protects against infections, the lower acidity can lead to urinary tract infections, which can be serious as a person gets older.

## GSM SYMPTOMS

GSM symptoms may include:

- Vaginal dryness, burning, or discharge
- Genital itching
- Burning, urgent, or frequent urination
- Repeated urinary tract infections
- Urinary incontinence, or urine leaks
- Decreased vaginal lubrication, light bleeding after, and discomfort during sexual activity
- Vaginal discharge—thin, watery, yellow, or gray
- Shortening and tightening of the vaginal canal



## Women Veterans Call Center

The Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) is your guide to VA. All calls are answered by women, many of whom are Veterans themselves, who will help you navigate VA, answer your questions about VA services and benefits available to you, and connect you with the Women Veterans Program Manager at your local VA medical center. This service is free, and you can call as many times as you need.

Call or text us at 855-VA-WOMEN (855-829-6636). WVCC representatives are available Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET, and Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. ET. You can also chat with us online and learn more by visiting <https://www.womenshealth.va.gov>



### Am I Eligible for VA Health Care?

Everyone's situation is unique and so is their eligibility. To find out if you are eligible to enroll, visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility>

### Apply Online or By Mail

Go to <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply>

### Apply in Person

Visit the nearest VA medical center or clinic. You can locate your nearest VA health facility at <https://www.va.gov/find-locations>

### Apply by Phone

To apply for VA benefits you may have earned—such as preventative care, inpatient and urgent care services—call 1-877-222-8387

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET.  
Veterans Benefits Administration 1-800-827-1000  
[www.vba.va.gov](http://www.vba.va.gov)

## WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE

# VAGINAL AND URINARY SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# VAGINAL & URINARY SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE



## WHAT ARE VAGINAL AND URINARY SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE?

In addition to hot flashes and trouble sleeping, you may experience vaginal and urinary symptoms of menopause, also known as **genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM)**. They may occur during or after menopause. Menopause is a normal part of aging when people stop having menstrual periods.



GSM refers to a set of symptoms that affect your vulva, vagina, and urethra. Decreased estrogen levels affect the vaginal and urinary areas, which leads to thinning, drying, burning, and itching. For many people, this process may make sexual activity painful and can lead to distressing urinary symptoms. Your VA primary care provider can help you find relief for these uncomfortable symptoms.

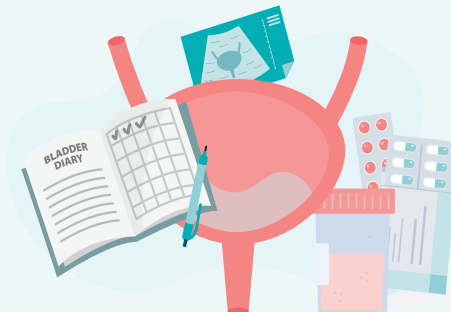
## URINARY INCONTINENCE

Urinary incontinence affects about 50% of post-menopausal people. It is not an inevitable part of aging that you must deal with. You can try many at home and medical treatments to get relief. Often simple lifestyle changes can help, such as to:

- Avoid drinking a lot before sleeping or at night
- Limit the amount of alcohol and caffeine you drink
- Empty your bladder every 3-4 hours when you are awake and every 4-8 hours when you are sleeping
- Avoid emptying your bladder “just in case”
- Try exercises to strengthen your pelvic muscles—check with your primary care provider to get instructions

VA also offers medical treatments to help reduce urine leaks. Your primary care provider may suggest one or more of the following:

- Vaginal pessary, a small disc that when inserted can support your bladder muscles
- Medications, like topical/vaginal estrogen treatment
- Pelvic floor physical therapy
- Botox® (or a generic brand) injections in the bladder
- Electrical stimulation
- Minimally invasive surgeries



## GSM TREATMENTS

Estrogen is the most effective therapy for symptoms like vaginal discomfort and dryness. VA offers the following estrogen therapy options for GSM:

- Vaginal estrogen tablets
- Vaginal estrogen cream
- Estrogen patches
- Oral estrogen

Some people find relief with over-the-counter treatments such as vaginal moisturizers or lubricants. These therapies can help relieve itching and dryness with sexual activity. Both moisturizers and lubricants are safe to use with vaginal estrogen therapy.

Topical vaginal estrogen therapy (cream or pill form) is safe. Some people may also need oral estrogen pills or patches to treat GSM effectively. Talk with your primary care provider to discuss your best options.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF VAGINAL ESTROGEN THERAPY?

Vaginal estrogen therapy offers help in several ways, including:

- Relief from vaginal symptoms such as vaginal dryness, irritation, and vaginal discharge
- Decreased risk of urinary tract infections
- Improved vaginal pH, resulting in fewer infections
- Improved comfort with sexual activity