

Vaginal health

Vaginal health is an important part of overall well-being. Cancer and its treatments can affect vaginal comfort, function and sensation. These changes are common. They can affect daily comfort, intimate relationships and quality of life.

Vaginal changes may include:

- Burning, stinging or itching
- Dryness or tightness
- Sharp pain or aching
- Pain with penetration

Vaginal changes during and after cancer treatment are common.
You are not alone.
Support is available.

Why do vaginal changes happen?

Cancer treatments can change how the vagina and pelvic area feel and work. These changes might include:

- Lower estrogen levels — the vaginal tissue becomes thinner and drier
- Less blood flow — the tissue may feel less stretchy and heal more slowly
- Changes in vaginal balance (pH) — more sensitivity and irritation

These changes can lead to dryness, tightness, pain, itching, burning and discomfort with daily activities such as sitting, walking or wiping as well as pain with penetration.

What can I do to help?

Using a vaginal moisturizer regularly can help improve moisture and comfort. Natural products, such as coconut or olive oil, may also help.

How to use	• Apply every night for 1 to 2 months, then every other night or 2 to 3 times a week. • Apply both inside the vagina and on the vulva. • It can take up to 3 months to feel the full benefits of a vaginal moisturizer.	
Benefits	• Removes dry tissue • Makes tissue more flexible	• Increases moisture • Reduces irritation
Consider vaginal estrogen	Vaginal estrogen may: • Increase natural lubrication • Make vaginal tissue thicker and healthier • Reduce irritation • Reduce the risk of urinary tract infections Vaginal estrogen is considered relatively low risk, even for many people with hormone-sensitive cancers. Talk to your healthcare team to see if it is right for you.	

Improve blood flow to the tissue

Healthy tissue needs good blood flow to stay strong and flexible.

Helpful strategies:

- Touch and massage (internal or external, if comfortable)
- Perineal massage (area between the vagina and anus)
- Taking time for arousal before penetration
- Gentle vibration
- A warm compress or heat

This can help:

- Increase natural lubrication
- Lower the risk of tearing
- Improve flexibility and comfort

Use a personal lubricant

Lubricant helps reduce friction and protect sensitive tissue.

Silicone-based lubricants (best for severe dryness):

- Last longer
- Need to be applied less often
- Work well for severe dryness
- May damage silicone toys

Water-based lubricants:

- Safe to use with all toys
- Easy to clean
- Need to be reapplied more often

Gentle stretching may help

If the vagina feels tight or penetration is painful, gentle stretching can help. Try:

- Vaginal dilators (used to slowly stretch the tissue)
- Perineal massage to improve flexibility

Talk to a healthcare provider to find out what is right for you.

If you choose to have sexual activity

If you choose to have sexual activity, focusing on comfort and positive experiences can help your body respond more easily. It is okay to not want to have sex. Only do what feels right for you.

Helpful tips:

- Do things that feel good
- Do not push through pain
- Take your time and go slowly
- Focus on comfort

When to seek help

Talk to your healthcare provider if:

- You are worried about any vaginal changes or pain
- Pain does not improve or gets worse
- You would like help with treatment options

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/cca_sexualhealth for more sexual health information and trusted online resources.

