



Vaginal Dryness – a BAYS Primer

Of the many side effects we frequently hear about at BAYS meetings and on our email listserv, finding your nethers with the same atmospheric conditions as the Sahara is often most upsetting. A wide variety of our treatments—from chemo to hormone therapy to an oophorectomy—can lead to this non-life-threatening, yet immensely frustrating situation. And BAYS members are FAR too young to give up on getting it on. So we've culled our members for the best of the best advice over the years to bring a little life back where the sun doesn't shine.

1. Creating an environment of general juiciness, sans estrogen

(a) Coconut oil. Triple ding-ding-ding on this one, as the most common suggestion from the group over the years (and mentioned by many of our gynecologists). Coconut oil is solid at room temperature, melts when warmed and can be used daily to keep delicate tissue both inside and outside the body moisturized. Also, it smells wonderful. And it's cheap! One BAYS member loads up ice cube trays with coconut oil, then freezes the trays, pops the cubes out, and inserts a cube each evening into her vagina for ultimate moisturizer and ease of insertion.

(b) Vitamin D or Vitamin E capsules. These can be broken apart and placed into the vagina directly, a couple of times a week

(c) Replens. This over-the-counter vaginal moisturizer can be bought at a drugstore and is advertised as safe for daily use. However, note that some BAYS members have found that some formulations use methylparaben as an antimicrobial preservative, so something to watch out for if you are concerned about parabens and their links to endocrine disruption.

(d) Other brands of daily or 2-3 times/week vaginal moisturizers. One member suggests Luvena as a paraben-free alternative to Replens, another suggests HYALO GYN as a non-hormonal vaginal hydrating gel and yet another, Honey Girl Organics personal lubricant. Any of these can be used 2-3 times/week.

2. Tools of the trade

(a) Lube shooter. You can get these at Good Vibrations stores around the Bay Area or online. They are basically used to help you get the lube of choice up where it should be. (Note this probably works best with a liquid or gel formation, as opposed to a solid like coconut oil).

(b) Vaginal dilators. When atrophy strikes, a set of vaginal dilators can be helpful to open up the tissue. One member recommends this one:

<http://www.vaginsmus.com/>

(b) Mona Lisa touch. One BAYS woman heard about this from her doc; it's a new laser treatment for vaginal dryness which increases collagen in the vagina. BAYS will not vouch for how pricey this may or may not be, but if you try it and it works, please let us know!

3. Suggestions for those able to/interested in hormonal options

(a) E-string. A small device that you insert quarterly and that deposits small amounts of estrogen locally in the vagina. It seems that BAYS oncologists have different opinions on the safety of this for women who have had hormone-positive breast cancer, so please check with your doc.

(b) If you are using an E-string, some members recommend coconut oil as well towards the end of the 3-month cycle (apparently it can start to get a little itchy up there in the last two weeks or so).

(c) Vagifem, Estrace, etc. These are vaginal suppositories of estradiol. Again, as with E-string, your oncologist should be able to help you understand if these might make sense for you or not

4. And, finally...let's talk about sex

(a) Lube, lube and more lube. BAYS women are quick to recommend their favorite lubes for fun time. A few we've culled from the listserv below:

- Pink silicone lubricant for women
- Blossom Organics
- Organic Orange Blossom
- Good Clean Love (from Aloe Vera)
- YES (oil-based with Shea butter)
- Pjur Bodyglide
- Personal Gel Intimate Moisturizer by Aloe Life
- And of course, coconut oil ;-)

Two things of note on lube used for sex (as opposed to general daily dryness): a few members flagged that water-based lubricant may not be sufficient for sex, so you might need an oil or silicone based product, depending on your preferences. And secondly,

some brands do contain phytoestrogens such as wild yam or calendula, so look out for these if this is important to you.

Finally, three other resources recommended by members:

(a) a simple guide to lube at <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/what-lube>.

(b) For sex questions, San Francisco's Sex Information's phone and email hotline is free and staffed 3-9 M-Sat. <http://www.sfsi.org>.

(c) For a podcast, books and other resources, <http://sexnerdsandra.com/2011/10/12/sex-and-cancer-episode-10-links-tips/#more-785>.