



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How common are the symptoms?

Up to 55% of post-menopausal women experience vaginal dryness, and as many as 41% of us feel pain during sex.

2. If I can put up with the symptoms, why should I talk to a healthcare professional about them?

Unlike hot flashes, vaginal atrophy will not go away over time. Since women with VA have a higher risk of developing vaginal infections, or of getting open sores and cracks in the vaginal wall, talking to your healthcare professional about your symptoms now can help you avoid problems in the future.

3. How do I know if I've reached menopause?

Technically speaking, you've reached "the change" 12 months after your last menstrual period. But even before menopause, some of us may notice other signs of our changing hormones, like hot flashes, mood swings, and increased abdominal fat (sorry – don't shoot the messenger!). Regardless of how we're affected, it's important that we all see our doctors and talk to our healthcare professionals before and after reaching menopause to monitor, prevent, or treat any health issues.

4. How does my healthcare professional hear about new SOGC recommendations for treating vaginal atrophy and other women's health conditions?

The SOGC publishes guidelines for clinical practice in the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada (JOGC), which is mailed to members each month. Recommendations are also posted on the SOGC's website so that we can all stay in-the-know when it comes to our own health.

5. How do I know if I should see my doctor or nurse practitioner?

Make an appointment to talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner if you notice any uncomfortable or unusual symptoms, even if you're not sure if it's vaginal atrophy. Keep an eye out for vaginal discharge, burning, dryness, itching, and pain or bleeding when you have sex.

6. What should I do if sex is too painful?

If you're experiencing serious irritation, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner before having sex. Otherwise, try a water-based lubricant to make things a little more comfortable in bed.

7. What is estrogen?

Estrogen is a hormone produced mainly by our ovaries that helps our bodies develop and maintain our reproductive system. More specifically, estrogen (along with another reproductive hormone, called progesterone) regulates our menstrual cycles. When menopause happens and we stop having menstrual periods, it is because our ovaries have stopped producing enough of these two hormones.

8. What different treatment options might my doctor or nurse practitioner suggest?

There are many different ways to treat The Big Ow. Your doctor or nurse practitioner may prescribe a mess-free treatment option, like a tablet or ring that is inserted into the vagina. Alternatively, he or she may give you a vaginal cream for your symptoms.

9. Why do some women feel The Big Ow but others don't?

Vaginal atrophy is very common. Many of us experience symptoms once we reach menopause, sometimes starting even earlier. It's true that there are certain factors that put some of us at higher risk though, such as smoking and never giving birth vaginally.