

## Women’s Sexual Health after Cancer Treatment

Some cancer treatments can cause dryness and shrinking of the vagina. This can make it painful to have sex. It can also make follow-up exams hard for your cancer care team. This factsheet gives tips to help.

### Vaginal Lubricants

These act right away to ease dryness during sex. You put them in and around your vagina right before you have sex. You can also put them on the penis, other body parts, or instruments that go into your vagina.

There are three types of lubricants: water-based, silicone-based, and oil-based. Some products called hybrids have a combined water and silicone base.

- Water-based lubricants wash off easily and do not leave stains. They lose their slickness more quickly than silicone-based.
- Silicone-based lubricants stay slippery longer than water-based. They do not wash off the skin as easily. They may leave a sticky feeling even after washing.
- Do NOT use oil-based lubricants. Mineral-based oils such as baby oil and petroleum jelly can irritate your vagina. All oil-based lubricants, including vegetable oils, can make condoms less effective.
- Avoid products that have glycerin or flavors, and those that warm the skin or make it tingle.

### Vaginal Moisturizers

These help ease dryness at other times than during sex. You need to use them often, up to three times a week.

**Oil-based moisturizers are OK** if you have no history of urinary tract infections, yeast infections, or diabetes. You may still need to use a lubricant during sex.

### Vaginal Dilators

You can use dilators to gently stretch your vagina slowly over time. Some women find vaginal dilation a helpful way to return to having sex.

Dilators are made of plastic or silicone in several sizes. You need to use a lubricant with your dilator.

### Where to Find These Products

You can find lubricants and moisturizers at pharmacies and online. You can find dilators at specialty shops and online. Your radiation therapy or oncology team may also provide them.

**Lubricants and moisturizers will not protect you from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.**

Vaginal Lubricants	
Type	Brands
Water-based lubricants	Astroglide® Good Clean Love® Just Like Me® K-Y Jelly® or Ultra Gel® Lubrin® Maximus® Pink® Probe Silky Light® Slippery Stuff® Sliquid® Surgilube® Sylk®
Silicon-based lubricants	Astroglide® I-D® Millennium® Just Like Me® Pink® Sliquid®
Hybrid-based lubricants	Astroglide® Liquid Silk® Sliquid®

Vaginal Moisturizers	
Type	Brands
Moisturizers	Good Clean Love® Restore® Luvena® Replens® Extra virgin olive oil Vitamin E oil Coconut oil

Many brands make several types of lubricants. Read labels carefully. This list shows a sampling of common brands. Inclusion on this list does not imply endorsement from Huntsman Cancer Institute.

*Adapted from "Improving Sexual Health" by University of Michigan Health System.*