

## **Using topical lidocaine for pain at the vaginal opening:**

There are several choices and each has its specific uses.

**Lidocaine aqueous 4%.** Recent excellent research shows that this is highly effective in treating pain at the vaginal vestibule. This lidocaine comes in a liquid form. You can apply it by soaking 1-2 cotton balls (or makeup pads) and placing the cotton ball at the vaginal opening for 2-5 minutes. You can determine how much time is best for you. Some women have difficulty finding the right spot. You may want to take a mirror with you to your next visit with your clinician and ask him/her to show you exactly. Some women worry that they may “lose” the cotton ball or small pad if it gets too far inside the vagina. Another option is to apply the liquid lidocaine with a large cotton swab (a cotton ball on a stick, named Scopette or Procto swab).

This liquid form of lidocaine numbs only the painful spots on your vaginal skin and doesn't cause any numbness for your partner. A personal lubricant, one that is designed for sexual activity, will replace the natural lubrication that is reduced when vaginal estrogen is low. Silicone lubricants have been shown to be highly effective when used with liquid lidocaine in women with breast cancer.

**Pelvic floor muscle spasm and pain.** If there is internal pain despite treating the skin, you may have painful muscles that can be treated by a physical therapist. A gynecologist can check your muscles (the ones used for Kegel exercises) to determine whether the muscles are contributing to painful sex. The physical therapist knows techniques to help relax the muscles and she can teach you relaxation skills to keep the muscles from becoming too tight.

The friction of sex can annoy the tissue and cause burning and irritation for several hours or days afterward. Longer lasting forms of lidocaine--ointment or gel--are more effective for this than the liquid form of lidocaine.

**Lidocaine ointment 5%** feels like Vaseline and it is the strongest form available. It can be placed on a cotton ball in the vaginal opening overnight to provide continuous pain relief like a “lidocaine patch.” Many women report that the ointment causes about 15 seconds of a burning sensation just when the ointment is applied. The ointment is not a good lubricant for sexual activity, so it is best not to use it for several hours prior to being sexually active. Some sexual partners report a mild numbness when you use lidocaine ointment before sex.

**Lidocaine jelly 2%** is a water-based gel that relieves pain for shorter period of time, but it doesn't usually cause as much burning with application. Lidocaine jelly isn't a good lubricant itself, but it doesn't interfere with other lubricants. Lidocaine jelly may also cause some partner numbness. Lidocaine ointment and jelly can be used for everyday activities that cause pain, such as inserting a tampon, having a pap smear, visiting your physical therapist or riding a bike.

Despite these preparations, both you and your partner may find that you are feeling anxious about having sex. Your partner may be very worried about hurting you. You may be thinking about how you are going to “tolerate” sex enough for his pleasure, and not looking forward to your ability to enjoy sex

yourself. Sharing your worries with your partner can often lessen the burden of holding the worry alone. Sharing your concerns may give your partner some emotional space to share his/her worries. Start slowly and carefully, and try to build your confidence together. Remember, it takes two to tango. If it seems that concerns and worries are always interfering, there are counselors with expertise to help you or you and your partner to navigate these changes in intimacy.