

# private health

## Is this watery discharge a sign of infection?

**Q** I went through menopause last year, so I assumed my “weird discharge” days were long gone. But several weeks ago, I noticed an odd watery discharge. At first I thought it was just sweat, especially since I’m not in any pain. But every day since then, I’ve had to use a panty liner. Might I have an infection?

**A** I don’t believe so. In the absence of itching, burning, redness or a foul odor, your discharge is likely the result of *atrophic vaginitis*, a treatable condition that occurs when estrogen levels decline after menopause.

Here’s how it develops: In a woman’s premenopausal years, estrogen flows through the body and fluffs up the vagina with ridges of tissue called *rugae*. But as estrogen wanes, the vagina loses many of those *rugae* and is left with thinner, more delicate cells lining its wall. These cells are apt to get inflamed and leaky, resulting in a clear (or whitish) watery, odorless discharge. Low estrogen can also go on to cause painful intercourse, burning during urination and shrinking of the genitals.

Fortunately, there’s no reason to endure such symptoms. If your ob-gyn determines that atrophic vaginitis is indeed the cause of your discharge, she may prescribe vaginal estrogen (available in creams, rings and suppositories). This topical form of estrogen delivers the hormone directly to vaginal cells and generally eases symptoms within one month. (Just note that if you are experiencing additional menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes or difficulty sleeping, your doctor may recommend a systemic form of estrogen therapy.) If you prefer to avoid hormonal treatment for vaginal symptoms, you could try a gentle lubricant like Replens Long-Lasting Vaginal Moisturizer (\$18 for 14 applications, at drugstores), which is formulated to last 72 hours per application and may prove to be sufficiently soothing.



## THE WEEK BEFORE MY PERIOD, I’M HUNGRY 24/7, and all I crave is candy. How can I lose weight like this?

**A** I hear you, girlfriend. All month long you’re munching on salads, taking walks, nurturing your body toward your optimal weight, and then *thwack*: Aunt Flo comes a knockin’ and all of a sudden you’re jonesing for Skittles and Ho Hos. Sounds like you’re suffering from what we doctors call PMS-C, a form of PMS characterized by cravings for sweets and an increased appetite, plus fatigue, light-headedness and headaches.

While there’s no clear explanation for why PMS-C occurs, we suspect that it happens when hormonal fluctuations temporarily make the body’s cells overly sensitive to insulin, a hormone that helps transport sugar out of the bloodstream and into bodily tissue. But this can leave blood sugar

too low, triggering a mad dash for the junk food stash. Scarf a bag of M&M’s and your insulin level spikes, setting the stage for *another* blood sugar plunge.

Although I’m a big believer in loving your body as is (curves, pudg and all), I understand that weight loss may be important to your vitality if you are overweight. To that end, I recommend indulging your appetite with foods that have a low glycemic index, meaning they won’t bump up your insulin level when your body is hypersensitive to it. Great snack choices include hard-boiled eggs, almonds, olives, carrot sticks with hummus and whole-wheat toast with a smear of peanut butter. These foods should help knock out your cravings and keep you on track with your weight-loss goals.

## WONDERING ABOUT A FEMALE PROBLEM?



Lissa Rankin, M.D., is an ob-gyn and founder of the Owning Pink Center, an integrative women’s health facility in Mill Valley, California. She is the author of the forthcoming book *What’s Up Down There? Questions You’d Only Ask Your Gynecologist If She Was Your Best Friend* (St. Martin’s Press, 2010). To ask her a question, send an e-mail to [health@firstforwomen.com](mailto:health@firstforwomen.com) or join her free “What’s Up Down There?” forum at [OwningPink.com/forum](http://OwningPink.com/forum).