

# YOUR VOICE

*This article, by DES Action USA member Carol O'Leary, is another in a series of personal stories to be published in the VOICE. We hope you enjoy reading about the spirit of our members who are living good lives in spite of, and with, DES exposure. Do you have a DES story that communicates hope? Please email us at [info@desaction.org](mailto:info@desaction.org) for more information about submitting it.*

I decided to age naturally after watching my mother age. She was prescribed the synthetic estrogen Premarin, following radiation therapy for Hodgkin's disease, which put her into early menopause. The Premarin gave her endometrial cancer.

Given my DES exposure, and my mother's cancer, I wanted to avoid more hormonal exposures.

On the other hand—and please let me be brutally honest—I wanted to keep my 'girl parts' in working order. Vaginal dryness is a vexing problem for so many of us. So I started my search for products to moisturize and lubricate without the carcinogenic ingredient Paraben, which is added to personal care products to combat bacteria and mold. But the last thing I need is a carcinogen in the vaginal area.

I found most products at my local chain drugstore were, as they say in Britain, 'rubbish.' KY is messy and contains estrogen-mimicking parabens. Replens is made with glycerin, which caused repeated yeast infections until I put two and two together and realized that by using this lubricant I was putting sugar inside to feed the yeast. My doctor didn't even make the connection.

So I knew I'd have to go it alone. It was clear that asking doctors isn't much help. They know only name brand products they learned about in medical school—or that drug representatives promote to them.

I've learned a lot along the way on my own and I'm pleased with the results. Since I'm frequently asked about aging without hormone replacement therapy, I'll share with you what works for me. I don't endorse or sell

any of this. I'm just sharing information that may be useful for those of us who don't want to start using HRT or who want to ease off it.

A good place to start is a website recommended by another participant on our DES Action DES Daughter Online Support Group listserv. A Woman's Touch ([www.a-womans-touch.com](http://www.a-womans-touch.com)) is a store for women's health and sexuality run by two female gynecologists. They have an interesting vaginal renewal program and kit (\$50) that consists of lubricant, a vibrating wand and massage as an alternative to estrogen for menopausal dryness.

Another product to consider is Sliquid ([sliquid.com](http://sliquid.com)), for use as a lubricant/moisturizer. It's paraben and glycerin free. At the A Womans-Touch site is an applicator that works well. And drugstore.com has Sliquid singles that can be slipped into your purse next to a condom for use as needed when vaginal dryness might be an issue.

When my gynecologist advised me to 'use it or lose it' to maintain the health of my sexual system, I began looking into these products. Frankly, given my staunch Irish Catholic background, it wasn't easy to start. I carefully read all the directions to figure out how to use everything. My friends joke that I'm so naive they claim I grew up inside a closet in Boston, not in a neighborhood. So you can see this was a huge step for me. But I was de-

termined to deal with vaginal dryness without HRT, and it's working!

Of note is that for those with a partner the recommendation is to continue, or increase your intimate sessions to keep things moist. That's where knowing about moisturizers and lubricants really helps, especially after age 50.

The staff at [www.a-womans-touch.com](http://www.a-womans-touch.com) and [sliquid.com](http://sliquid.com) are very helpful. A Woman's Touch has downloadable brochures with information on sexual health as we age, along with information on sexuality after cancer, too.

For external dryness while exercising I've had awesome luck with the anti-chafing 'Soothing Care Powder Gel' from Monistat. Made with silicone, it keeps me from getting chafed when I do hours of Zumba dancing.

I was uncomfortable at first learning about negotiating life without HRT. I had to make decisions about an area of my body to which I hadn't previously given much thought. Now I hope what I've shared here will get you going, too. Options exist for all women, and especially for DES Mothers, Daughters and down the road DES Granddaughters who wish to avoid, or decrease, extra hormonal exposures. These are just a few. When you look you'll find the ones that work best for you. Make yourself a little kit and then go about enjoying life to the fullest.

