

Vaginal rejuvenation

New laser treatment offers hope for survivors, postmenopausal women

By Kelly Farrell
Daily News Correspondent
239-213-5365

Breast cancer survivors and postmenopausal women might have something in common: vaginal atrophy.

Spurred from a lack of estrogen during and after menopause — or in breast cancer survivors who experienced early onset menopause — the condition often thins the vaginal wall and causes dryness, painful intercourse, incontinence or frequent urination. It is estimated to affect up to 50 percent of postmenopausal women, according to a 2010 study on vulvovaginal atrophy, published by the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research.

But there's a procedure new to Southwest Florida, called the MonaLisa Touch, that reverses conditions of vaginal atrophy.

"This can be a difficult thing for women to ask about but it's important for women to know this happens to almost all women after menopause without treatment. So, unfortunately, it's normal," said

Dr. Kevin Fleishman, an obstetrician-gynecologist at Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida in Fort Myers.

The MonaLisa Touch was invented in Italy and approved earlier this year by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

This five-minute visit in the doctor's office is an alternative to hormone replacement therapy and is a great fit for breast cancer survivors and postmenopausal women who experience vaginal atrophy. This nondrug and nonsurgical option allows women to once again experience pleasure during sexual activity, as well as gain comfort.

"People are staying more active as they age. Sexual activity is a really important part of that," Fleishman said.

Patients undergo three 45-second laser treatments with CO2 laser energy to the vaginal wall, which promotes production of new collagen and a return to premenopausal vaginal health, doctors reported.

Three treatments are



Kevin
Fleishman



Rex
Stubbs

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida

Where: 9021 Park Royal Drive, Fort Myers

Contact: 239-477-5650 or visit ppcswfl.com/mona-lisa-touch.php

required and spaced approximately six weeks apart. Then, one treatment per year is recommended, said Dr. Rex Stubbs, obstetrician-gynecologist of Physicians' Primary Care of SWFL.

Stubbs and Fleishman became interested in bringing the procedure to the area when they learned of success being reported by Dr. Mickey Karram, director of urogynecology at The Christ Hospital in Cincinnati.

"He's a really respected doctor. So we visited, saw the results he was having, listened to his patients and decided to bring it to Florida," Stubbs said.

Since May, about 80 patients have experienced the procedures and all have reported improvements, Stubbs said.

"It often improves the sense of sudden and frequent urination that comes along with this condition. If you're no longer getting up four times at night, that's a significant quality of life issue," Stubbs said.

So far, insurance does not cover this procedure. The cost is about \$600 per treatment and \$1,500 for the full initial package of three treatments.

Improvements are experienced after the first treatment and continue through the final, third treatment, Fleishman said.

The CO2 laser stimulates the vaginal wall, increases collagen production, moisture, lubrication and elasticity.

"This is a life-changing treatment for many women," Fleishman said.