

# **Vaginal Atrophy and Genital Pain in Women on Depot Medroxyprogesterone Acetate Contraceptive Injection**

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## **Background:**

Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate is an injectable contraceptive that is used worldwide by millions of women. The 3-monthly dosing is convenient, and it is highly effective in prevention of pregnancy. Side effects include irregular menstrual bleeding, weight gain, dizziness, acne, depression, abdominal pain, and headache. Sexual dysfunction is mentioned infrequently as a possible side effect, and vaginal atrophy is thought to occur rarely. The objective of this case series is to raise awareness that depot medroxyprogesterone acetate causes a hypo-estrogenic state in a proportion of women and this may result in clinical vaginal atrophy causing vaginal dryness and superficial dyspareunia.

## **Methods:**

This is a case series of 10 women using depot medroxyprogesterone acetate who presented to a specialist sexual health service over a 5-year period with chronic superficial dyspareunia and clinical vaginal atrophy. All patients were examined and had a vaginal maturation index performed. They were all treated with vaginal estriol cream and their contraception was discontinued or changed. They were reviewed to assess response to treatment.

## **Results:**

All patients had either a complete resolution of symptoms or a substantial improvement in symptoms at follow-up. A further vaginal maturation index was performed, and this had improved in all patients except one patient who had a sample that was unable to be evaluated due to extensive cytolysis.

## **Conclusions:**

It is well documented that depot medroxyprogesterone acetate causes a hypo-estrogenic state in over half the women who use it for contraception, but symptomatic vaginal atrophy is thought to occur rarely. This case series demonstrates that vaginal atrophy may occur more frequently than previously thought and responds well to appropriate treatment.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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