

TREATMENT OF VAGINAL DRYNESS IN WOMEN AFFECTED BY SYSTEMIC SCLEROSIS AND EFFECTS ON SEXUAL DISCOMFORT

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Introduction

Current research suggests that physical changes associated with systemic sclerosis (SS) can impact negatively on the sexual activity of a woman and, consequently, of her partner. Skin induration around vaginal opening and breast, muscle weakening and articular pain which affect these patients are often cause of decrease in sexual desire and arousal and, therefore, in sexual activity (1,2,3). Furthermore, the alteration of the external mucous membrane of the vagina can modify (its) its normal lubrication processes, causing discomfort and pain during sexual intercourse and influencing the couple relationship. Moreover, it is also to be considered that several drugs, such as diuretics, vasoactive therapies and antidepressants used in the treatment of symptoms related to systemic sclerosis, exert a negative effect on sexual functioning (4).

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a topical formulation designed for women's intimate area (Dermoxen[®] intimate cream Lenitiva) in hydrating and soothing the troubles of the external intimate area and in improving the level of comfort during sexual intercourse.

Materials and methods

The authors developed an independent, randomised, double blind clinical trial at the Department of Rheumatology of "A. Galateo" Hospital in San Cesario di Lecce. 76 women affected by systemic sclerosis (aged between 18 and 65 years, mean age 47,8) treated with Iloprost once a month, were enrolled and divided into two groups: 40 women (study group, SG) followed a specific treatment with Dermoxen[®] intimate cream Lenitiva (based on active principle of natural origin); the remaining 36 women (control group, CG) followed a treatment with placebo cream. Patients positive to Anti SS/A and Anti SS/B were excluded from the trial. The patients of the study group were instructed to do the treatment once a day for a month. The assessment has been done through the administration of questionnaires Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI)(5), a questionnaire composed of 19 questions aimed at evaluating sexual functioning in women focused on 6 parameters (desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, satisfaction and pain). High scores of the parameters or of the total result indicate a better sexual functioning. A score of 26,55 is identified as cut-off value, and it is proposed as a parameter that can compromise sexual functioning. Therefore, lower scores indicate that sexual functioning is compromised.

Results

From the statistical analysis carried out on the FSFI scores obtained from the two groups under investigation, at time 0 and after a month of treatment we found a significant improvement ($p < 0.05$) in the domain related to Lubrication and Satisfaction with reference to the Study group. Moreover, the specific action of the product analysed in the study group seems to determine a very significant improvement ($p < 0.01$) concerning the pain sensation during sexual intercourse. Definitely, the study group showed significant improvement in the level of moisturization of the external mucous membrane of vagina and, consequently, a reduction of pain during sexual intercourse compared to the beginning of treatment. No significant improvement has been observed in arousal, desire and orgasm in the study group. However, the total FSFI score showed significant improvement. These improvements have not been observed in the control group.

FSFI scale	Study group n=40		Control group n=36	
	t0	t1	t0	t1
Desire	3.9±0.4	4.1±1.2	4.3±0.5	4.1±0.8
Arousal	2.5±1.2	2.6±0.8	3.1±0.1	3.0±0.2
Lubrication	1.6±0.7	3.2±0.4*	1.9±0.4	2.0±0.5
Orgasm	3.4±0.3	3.2±0.7	3.9±1.8	3.6±0.9
Satisfaction	3.9±0.8	5.3±0.5*	2.9±0.8	3.3±0.3
Pain	1.2±1.0	5.5±0.9**	1.7±0.5	1.3±0.4
TOTAL SCORE	16.5±4.4	23.9±4.5*	17.8±4.1	17.3±3.1

Table1: analysis results of FSFI scores obtained at t0 and t1 for the two groups (study group and control group).

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

Discussions and conclusions

According to the obtained results, the treatment with Dermoxen[®] intimate cream Lenitiva seems to be effective in treating problems related to moisturization and lubrication of external genital area in scleroderma women, producing a reduction in pain sensation during sexual intercourse and consequently improving sexual comfort. The product in question does not contain cortisone or oestrogens. Therefore, it can be recommended as a daily treatment. In order to further confirm the obtained results, the authors are determined to propose the same treatment for a longer period of time and to administer the Hill questionnaire to the patients in order to investigate how and how much rheumatic affections can influence sexual function, the relationship with the partner, daily and social activities, mood alterations and working life.

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