

Vulvar Skin Care

The vulva is the external genitalia in the female. The skin of the vulva can be quite sensitive. Because it is moist and frequently subjected to friction while sitting and moving, this area can be easily injured. There are numerous strategies that can be used to prevent irritation and allow the vulva to heal.

Hygiene

Chemicals in deodorant soaps, bubble baths, feminine hygiene spray, baby wipes and panty liners can all cause vulvar irritation and therefore should be avoided.

- Use very mild soaps for bathing. Neutrogena and Dove are recommended. Do not use soap directly on the vulvar skin. Use only warm water for cleansing. Frequent baths with soaps irritate skin. Scrubbing the vulvar area also causes irritation. Remember you cannot wash away your symptoms.
- Rinse skin off with plain water. Pat the skin dry gently.
- Aveeno or baking soda soaks in lukewarm water may help soothe irritation.
- Use white unscented toilet paper.
- Avoid scented pads and tampons. Use cotton menstrual pads and tampons. Some pads with the dry weave plastic coating may also lead to vulvar irritation. Tampons should only be used if the flow is heavy enough to soak them in under 4 hours. If the flow is too light a vaginal infection may develop.
- Do not douche.
- Avoid all over the counter treatments unless advised by your healthcare provider.
- Do not shave the vulvar area.
- Keep dry. Skin that is moist becomes soft and is easily injured. Therefore, keeping this area dry will promote healing. Do not sit or remain in a wet bathing suit. Choose cotton fabrics. Change your undergarments if they become damp.
- Use lubricants suggested by your healthcare provider to make intercourse more comfortable. Astroglide or Olive Oil (not to be used with condoms) are products with natural lubrication.
- Apply A&D ointment or Crisco to the vulvar area as needed to protect the skin.

Clothing

Enclosing the vulvar area with synthetic fibers hold both heat and moisture in the skin, conditions which potentiate the development of secondary infections. Tight fitting clothes may also increase your symptoms of discomfort.

- Wear all cotton underwear. Cotton allows air to circulate. Synthetics hold in moisture.
- Avoid tight clothing including pantyhose, exercise shorts, and thong underwear.

Laundry Products

Chemicals found in laundry soaps, detergents and fabric softeners that contact the vulva cause irritation.

- Choose detergents free of dyes, enzymes and perfumes (ALL-Free and Clear or Earth Rite) on any clothing that comes in contact with the vulvar skin including underwear, tight fitting pants, and towels. Use half of the amount of detergent recommended per load. After washing underwear, put it through at least one whole cycle with water only. Wash new underwear before wearing.
- Fabric softeners and dryer sheets should not be used.