

## Guidelines for Vulvar Skin Care

NOTE: The goal is to promote healthy vulvar skin. This is done by decreasing and/or removing any chemicals, moisture or rubbing (friction). Any products listed below have been suggested for use because of their past success in helping to decrease or relieve vulvar/vaginal itching and burning.

### Laundry Products

- **Use a detergent free of dyes, enzymes and perfumes** (such as All Free and Clear) on any clothing that comes in contact with your vulva such as: underwear, exercise clothes, towels or pajama bottoms. Use 1/3 to 1/2 the suggested amount per load. Other clothing may be washed in the laundry soap of your choice.
- **Do not use fabric softener** in the washer or dryer on these articles of clothing. Do not use dryer sheets for your underwear.
- **Stain removing products:** soak and rinse in clear water all underwear and towels on which you have used a stain removing product. Then wash in your regular washing cycle. This removes as much of the product as possible.

### Clothing

- **Wear white, all cotton underwear** – not nylon with a cotton crotch. Cotton allows air in and moisture out.
- **Avoid Thongs**
- **Avoid pantyhose.** If you must wear them, cut out the diamond crotch (leave about 1/4 to 1/2 inch of fabric from the seam to prevent running) or wear thigh high hose. Many stores now carry thigh high nylons.
- **Avoid tight clothing, especially clothing made of synthetic fabrics.** Remove wet bathing and exercise clothing as soon as you can.

### Bathing and Hygiene

- **Avoid bath soaps, lotions, gels, etc. which contain perfumes.** These may smell nice but can be irritating. This includes many baby products and feminine hygiene products marked “gentle” or “mild.” Dove-Hypoallergenic, Neutrogena and Basis, Pears, and cetaphil are the cleansers we suggest. Do not use soap directly on vulvar skin, just warm water and your hand will keep the vulvar area clean without irritating the skin.
- **Avoid getting shampoo & conditioner in the vulvar area while washing your hair.**
- **Avoid all bubble baths, bath salts and scented oils.** You may apply a neutral (unscented, non-perfumed) oil such as Keri Oil to damp skin after getting out of the tub or shower. Vaseline is a wonderful lubricant to use after bathing. Do not apply oils directly to the vulva.
- **Do not scrub vulvar skin with a washcloth** – washing your hand and warm water is enough for a good cleaning.
- **Pat dry rather than rubbing with a towel** or use a hairdryer on a cool setting to dry the vulva.
- **Baking soda soaks.** Soak in lukewarm (not hot) bathwater with 4-5 tablespoons of baking soda to help soothe vulvar itching and burning. Soak 1-3 times a day for 10-15 minutes.
- **Use white, unscented toilet paper.** If paper has a perfumed scent or lotion, avoid using it.
- **Avoid all feminine hygiene sprays, perfumes, adult or baby wipes.** Pour lukewarm water over the vulva after urinating if urine causes burning of the skin. Pat dry rather than rubbing with a towel.

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- Consider buying a plastic sitz bath from a pharmacy that can fit into your toilet & provide soothing comfort to the vulva.
- **Avoid the use of deodorized pads and tampons.** Tampons should only be used when the blood flow is heavy enough to soak one tampon in four hours or less. Tampons are safe for most women, but wearing them too long, or when the blood flow is light may result in vaginal infection, increased discharge, odor or toxic shock syndrome.
- **Pads-** try not to wear pads at home. Avoid ALWAYS brand pantliners. Consider organic pads, tampons from a health food store. [www.gladrags.com](http://www.gladrags.com) sells a washable organic menstrual pad.
- **Avoid all over the counter creams or ointments, except Desitin or A and D Ointment.** Ask your health care provider first.
- **Small amounts of Desitin or A and D Ointment** may be applied to your vulva as often as needed to protect the skin. It may also help to decrease skin irritation during your period and when you urinate. Brands that have been helpful are the Fougera, Rugby or NMC brands.
- **Do not douche.** Baking soda soaks will help rinse away extra discharge and help with odor.
- **Do not shave the vulvar area.**
- **Some women may have problems with chronic dampness.** Keeping dry is important.
  - Choose cotton fabrics whenever you can.
  - Keep an extra pair of underwear with you in a small bag and change if you become damp during the day at work/school
  - Gold Bond Powder or Zeosorb Powder may be applied to the vulva and groin area one to two times per day to help absorb moisture.
- **Dryness and irritation** during intercourse may be helped by using a lubricant. Use a small amount of a pure vegetable oil such as coconut oil, olive oil, or Crisco (solid or oil). The vegetable oils contain no chemicals to irritate vulvar/vaginal skin. Vegetable oils will rinse away with water and will not increase your chance of infection. Water based products like K-Y Jelly are helpful, but may tend to dry before intercourse is over and also contain chemicals that can irritate your vulvar skin. It may help to use a non-lubricated spermicidal condom and use vegetable oil as the lubricant. This will help keep semen off the skin which can decrease burning and irritation after intercourse.
- **After a bowel movement**, always wipe from front to back to avoid contamination.
- **If you have difficulty cleaning after a bowel movement** try using cetaphil body wash or mineral oil after a bowel movement - don't rub.

### Birth Control Options

- The new low-dose oral birth control pills do not increase your chances of getting a yeast infection.
- Lubricated condoms, contraceptive jellies, creams or sponges may cause itching and burning. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist for help.