

Vulvar Skin Care and Hygiene Information

The vulva is the external portion of the genitals, which includes the clitoris, the inner and outer labia, and the vaginal opening and its surrounding area. Clothing, hygiene habits, sexual behavior, and physical activity all affect the health of the vulva. Sometimes bacteria, chemicals, and friction that come in contact with the vulva can cause irritation, odor, and pain. Vulvar discomfort can often be treated and prevented by making simple changes to your normal routine as outlined below.

Laundry Products:

When washing and drying clothing that comes in contact with the vulva:

- Use a detergent free of dyes, enzymes, and perfumes
- Double-rinse the wash load (add an extra rinse cycle to the end of the normal wash cycle)
- Avoid use of “scent boosters,” fabric softeners, and dryer sheets.

Clothing:

- Wear white 100% cotton underwear during the daytime and no underwear when sleeping.
- Avoid wearing pantyhose, tights, thongs, synthetic underwear, and tight or restrictive clothing.
- Remove wet bathing suits and exercise clothing promptly.

Bathing and Hygiene:

- Do not scrub vulvar skin with a washcloth.
 - Instead, wash vulva with your hand and pat dry with a towel.
- Avoid scented soaps, bubble baths, lotions, and gels that contain perfumes which can irritate the vulva.
 - Instead, use unscented and dye-free soaps such as Dove-Hypoallergenic®, Neutrogena®, or Basis®
- Avoid products such as vaginal wipes, deodorants, sprays, powders, and perfumes.
- Do not douche.
- Use soft, white, unscented toilet paper.
- Menstrual products:
 - Avoid wearing pantyliners every day.
 - When using menstrual pads and tampons, use ones that are 100% cotton.
- Do not shave, wax, or laser the vulvar area.
 - Removing hair from the bikini line is okay, though.

Sexual Activity:

- Use water-based or silicone-based non-allergenic, non-spermicidal lubricants that contain no fragrances/perfumes, colorings, flavors, or warming properties.
- Urinate (to prevent infection) and rinse vulva with cool water after vaginal penetration.
- Apply ice or a frozen blue gel pack in one layer of a hand towel to the vulva for 15 minutes to relieve burning, pain or swelling after intercourse.

Physical Activity and Lifestyle:

- Avoid exercises that put direct pressure on the vulva (such as bicycle riding and horseback riding).
- Limit intense exercises that create a lot of friction in the vulvar area.
- Apply ice or a frozen blue gel pack in one layer of a hand towel to the vulva for 15 minutes to relieve burning, pain or swelling after exercise.
- Do not swim in highly chlorinated pools and avoid the use of hot tubs.