

Guidelines for Vulva/Vaginal Skin Care

Laundry Products

- Use detergent free of dyes, enzymes and perfumes (such as ALL Free & Clear or Earth-Rite) on any clothing that comes in contact with your vulva, such as your underwear, exercise clothes, towels or pajama bottoms. Use 1/3 to half the suggest amount per load. Other clothing may be washed in the laundry soap of your choice.
- Do not use a fabric softener in the washer or dryer on these articles of clothing. If you do use dryer sheets with the rest of your clothes, for any loads, you must hang dry your underwear, towels and any other clothing that comes in contact with your vulva.
- 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. Thong or G-string type of underwear is not recommended on a daily basis.
- Avoid pantyhose. If you must wear them, either cut out the diamond crotch (if you cut the crotch be sure to leave ¼ to ½ 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 from synthetic fibers. Remove wet bathing suits and exercise clothing as soon as you can.

Bathing and Hygiene

- Avoid bath soaps, lotions, gels, etc. which contain perfume. These may smell nice but can be irritating. This includes many baby products and feminine hygiene products marked “gentle” or “mild”. We suggest Dove-Hypoallergenic, Neutrogena, Basis or Pears. Do not use soap directly on the vulvar skin. Just warm water and your hand will keep the vulvar area clean without irritating the skin.
- Avoid all bubble bath, bath salts and scented oils.
- Do not scrub vulvar skin with a washcloth. Washing with your hand is adequate for good cleaning.
- Do not use hot water while bathing or showering. Lukewarm water should be used.
- 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. A sitz bath that goes on the toilet is best. Soak 1-3 times per day for 10-15 minutes when you have vulvar symptoms.
- Use white, unscented toilet paper. If paper has a perfume or scent, avoid using it. Avoid “wiping” after urinating, only blot or dab.
- Avoid all feminine hygiene sprays, perfumes, and adult/baby wipes. Pour lukewarm water over the vulva after urinating if urine causes burning of the skin. Pat dry rather that rubbing with a towel.
- Avoid the use of deodorized pads and tampons. Tampons should be used when the blood flow us 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 too light may result in a vaginal infection,

increased discharge, odor or toxic shock syndrome. Also, use only pads that have a cotton liner that comes in contact with your skin (no dry weave pads).

- Do not use over the counter creams or ointments until you ask your healthcare provider. When buying ointments, be sure that they are paraben and fragrance free. Small amounts of extra virgin olive oil, vegetable oil or solid shortening may be applied to your vulva as often as you need to protect and moisturize the skin. It also helps to decrease skin irritation during your period and when you urinate.
- DO NOT DOUCHE. Baking soda soaks will help rinse away extra discharge and help with odor.
- Do not shave, wax or laser the vulvar area (bikini line is okay).
- Some women may have a problem with chronic dampness.
- Keeping dry is important.
- Do not wear pads daily.
- 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 pure vegetable oil/olive oil or Crisco (solid or oil). The vegetable oils contain no chemicals to irritate vulvar/vaginal skin. Vegetable oils rinse away with water and will not increase your chance of infection. Water based lubricants like K-Y Jelly tend to dry before intercourse is over and also contain chemicals that can irritate your skin. It may be helpful to use a non-lubricated, non-spermicidal condom and use vegetable oil as the lubricant. This will keep the semen off the skin which can decrease burning and irritation after intercourse.

Birth control options

- All hormonal contraceptives will have an effect on vaginal secretions but should not increase your frequency of vaginitis.
- Lubricated condoms, contraceptive jellies, creams or sponges may cause itching and burning. Ask your healthcare provider for help.
- The use of latex condoms with vegetable oil as a lubricant is suggested to protect your skin. Oil base lubricants may affect the integrity of the condoms when used for birth control or prevention of sexually transmitted infections. Our experience has not found this to be a problem with vegetable based oils. However, the Center for Disease Control recommends that condoms not be used with any oil based lubricants for birth control or prevention of sexually transmitted infections.