

Vulvar Skin Care Recommendations

Healthy vulvar skin is important for day to day comfort. Take a moment to review your skin care routine. The following are various strategies that can prevent irritation and allow the vulvar skin to heal. **Recommended brands are listed on the back of this handout.**

Be gentle with the vulvar skin. Rinse the skin with water no more than once per day and pat dry with a soft towel. Over washing can dry out the skin and make it more prone to irritation. Avoid prolonged exposure to hot water. Do not rub the skin excessively – do not use a face cloth to wash the skin. Do not use a hair dryer to dry the skin.

Is soap necessary? Vulvar irritation is not due to a lack of cleanliness. Soap is not necessary for good vulvar skin care. In fact, many soaps can be irritating and drying. If you prefer to use soap, look for unscented products designed for sensitive skin and labelled hypoallergenic. Products containing essential oils, although natural, can be irritating and should be avoided. Feminine wipes, douches and hygiene sprays should not be used.

Avoid contact irritation. Wear 100% cotton underwear and remove when sleeping. Wear loose clothing that encourages the air to circulate around the vulva. Women frequently find tight fitting clothing, such as thong underwear, tights and jeans, worsen their vulvar symptoms. Ensure that clothes coming in contact with the vulvar skin are rinsed thoroughly after washing with detergent to get rid of any residue. Avoid fabric softener and dryer sheets. Instead of synthetic menstrual pads and or liners consider using: 100% cotton pads or tampons, a menstrual cup or a reusable menstrual cloth pad.

Moisturize and protect the skin. Using a moisturizer on the vulvar skin on a daily basis can help heal irritated tissue. After a bath or shower apply a moisturizer, on the outside lips, inside lips and perineum. It is common that women will involuntarily leak urine or stool as they get older. If this is the case, use a thicker protective barrier cream. The barrier cream will sit on top of the skin, seal in the moisture and protect against contact with irritating substances.

Do not treat “suspected” infections. Many over the counter medications that treat yeast (eg. Canestan & Monistat creams) and or bacterial infections have ingredients in them that are irritating to the vulvar skin. Check with your doctor to see if you have an infection and then choose a medication that you can take by mouth.

Consider adding lube. Using a lubricant is common and many women find it enhances sexual pleasure. Apply the lubricant to the outside skin of the vulva as well as the entrance to the vagina just before sex. Review the ingredients listed on the lubricant. Some lubricants are made only with botanical or all natural ingredients. Avoid lubricants with “cooling or warming” sensations. If you experience friction, or rubbing, with penetrative intercourse, then consider a silicone based lubrication. Although remember, oil based lubes can make condoms ineffective. You can buy lube online or if you have questions, visiting a local sex shop can be helpful to find what will work for you.

Vulvar Skin Care Recommended Products

Soaps / Cleanser

- Warm water is adequate
- Do not use bar soap, shower gels etc.
- If necessary, use gentle cleansers that are labelled hypoallergenic
 - *Suggestions: Cetaphil, Aveeno*
- A sitz bath can be used for a warm and soothing soak for the vulva, perineum or perianal skin. A soak can be made using water and some unscented Epsom salts in a shallow bath

Vulvar Moisturizers & Barrier Creams

- For optimal skin care apply a moisturizer to the vulva (external genitalia) following a shower or bath when the skin is warm and most absorbent
 - *Suggestions: Glaxal base, Lubriderm, Cliniderm, CeraVe*
- For irritated or sensitive skin, a protective barrier may be helpful.
 - *Suggestions: Vaseline, Cetaphil barrier cream (may be temporarily unavailable) or an unscented zinc oxide based product; Penaten, Sudocrem, Desitin, Ilhe's paste*

Sanitary products

- Use 100% cotton pads or tampons such as Natracare
- Menstrual cups
 - *Suggestions: Diva cup (silicone), Moon cup (silicone), Keeper cup (contains latex). These can be ordered online.*
- Re-usable cotton pads
 - *Suggestions. Gladrags (gladrags.com) or Lunapads (lunapads.com)*
- Using a protective barrier cream may be helpful to protect the skin when using sanitary products

Lubrication for Sexual Activity

- Lubrication can reduce friction during penetrative intercourse
- The most common lubrication is water based.
 - *Suggestions: Good Clean Love, Astroglide for Sensitive Skin, Sliquid and Yes*
- Some women find the water based lubes dry out quickly. These lubes also contain more preservatives which can cause skin irritation. If this is your experience, you may want to try silicone or oil based lubes
 - *Suggestions for Silicone: Uber Lube, ID Millennium, Wet Platinum*
 - *Suggestions for Oil based: Yes*
- Your doctor may have recommended a non-hormonal vaginal moisturizer to help decrease pain with sex.
 - *Suggestions: Replens, Repagyn, Gynetrof, Mae and Zestica*