



Guidelines for Vulvar Skin Care

NOTE: Our goal is to promote healthy vulvar skin and decrease or relieve vaginal and vulvar symptoms. This is accomplished by the avoidance of potential contact irritants, chemicals, moisture, or rubbing (friction). These guidelines are based upon past success!

LAUNDRY PRODUCTS

1. **Use a detergent free of dyes, enzymes and perfumes** Use a "*Free and Clear*" detergent on any clothing that comes in contact with your vulva such as your underwear, exercise clothes, towels, or pajama bottoms. Baby detergents are usually scented so should not be used.
2. **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.* White vinegar can be used in the washer as a natural softener, and dry balls can help combat static.
3. **Stain Removing Products.** Bleach or stain removers are not recommended for your underwear.

CLOTHING

1. **Wear all cotton underwear with a white crotch** not nylon with a cotton crotch. Cotton allows air in and moisture out. Nylon underwear with a cotton crotch are acceptable ONLY if you are able to cut away the nylon covering the cotton crotch. Thong type underwear is not recommended on a daily basis. Sleeping without underwear is advised, loose fitting pajama pants or boxers are acceptable.
2. **Avoid full pantyhose.** If you wear them, cut out the diamond crotch (be sure to leave about 1/4 to 1/2 inch of fabric from the seam to prevent running) OR wear thigh high hose.
3. **Avoid tight clothing, especially clothing made of synthetic fabrics.** Remove wet bathing and exercise clothing as soon as you can. Limit use of spanx type garments.

BATHING AND HYGIENE

1. **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". Do not use body washes! We suggest any of the following soaps in a **bar** form: *Dove-Hypoallergenic, all natural olive oil soap, Neutrogena, Basis, or Pears.*
2. **Hand soap Dispensers:** use a liquid fragrance free soap.
3. **Hand sanitizers:** Before touching the vulvar skin, wash with a recommended soap to avoid irritation from the alcohol and chemicals in the hand sanitizers
4. **Avoid all bubble baths, bath salts and scented oils.**

5. **Do not scrub vulvar skin with a washcloth, loofa or net sponge.** Washing with your hands is adequate for good cleaning.
6. **Do not use hot water while bathing or showering.** Use **Only** luke-warm to cool water.
7. **Pat dry rather than rubbing with a towel** or use a hairdryer on a **cool** setting to dry the vulva.
8. **Baking Soda soaks.** Soak in lukewarm (not hot) bath water 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 to 3 times a day for 5-10 minutes when you have vulvar symptoms. A sitz bath tub is available without a prescription at your pharmacy or medical supply store.
9. **Use white, unscented toilet paper.** Avoid “ultra-soft or ultra strong” products, they are overly processed with chlorine and formaldehyde. Use a basic toilet paper such as Angel Soft, Scott or 7th Generation. Avoid “wiping” after urinating; blot, dab or rinse with tap water only.
10. **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.
11. **Avoid the use of deodorized pads and tampons.** Tampons should be used when the blood flow is heavy enough to soak one tampon in four hours or less. Menstruation cups are also acceptable. Use only pads that have a cotton liner that comes in contact with your skin (**no dry weave pads**).
12. **Do not use over-the-counter creams or ointments** until you ask your health care provider. When buying ointments, be sure that they are paraben and fragrance free.
13. **Small amounts of extra virgin olive oil, vegetable oil, coconut oil, or solid shortening** may be applied to your vulva and vagina as often as needed to protect and moisturize the skin. It also helps to decrease skin irritation during your period, and when you urinate
14. **DO NOT DOUCHE.** Baking soda soaks help rinse away extra discharge & help with odor.
15. **DO NOT SHAVE, wax or laser** the vulvar area (the bikini line is ok).
16. **Some women** may have problems with chronic dampness. *Keeping dry is important.*
 - o **Do not wear pads daily** as they block the free flow of air and rub on the tissues
 - o 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.
 - o A non-talc containing powder such as *Zeosorb Powder* may be applied to the vulva and groin area one to two times per day to help absorb moisture.
17. **Dryness and irritation** during intercourse may be helped by using a lubricant. Use a small amount of a pure vegetable oil/olive oil/shortening. The vegetable products contain no chemicals to irritate vulvar/vaginal skin, and will rinse away with water and will not increase your chances of infection. Water-based products like *K-Y Jelly* tend to dry before intercourse is over and also contain chemicals that can irritate your vulvar skin. It may be helpful to use a non-lubricated, non-spermicidal condom, and use vegetable oil as the lubricant.

BIRTH CONTROL OPTIONS

1. All hormonal contraceptives effect vaginal secretions but should not cause vaginitis.
2. Lubricated condoms, contraceptive jellies, creams, or sponges may cause itching and burning. Ask your health care provider for help.
3. The use of latex condoms with a vegetable oil as a lubricant (#17 above) is suggested to protect your skin. Oil based lubricants may affect the integrity of condoms when used for birth control or prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Our experience has not found this to be a problem with vegetable based oils. However, the Centers for Disease Control recommend that condoms not be used with any oil based lubricants for birth control or prevention of sexually transmitted disease.