



VULVAR CARE RECOMMENDATIONS

Background: The vulva is the external genitalia in the female. The skin of the vulva can be quite sensitive. Because it is moist and frequently subjected to friction while sitting and moving, this area can be easily injured. There are various ways to prevent irritation and allow the vulva to heal. Skin that is moist becomes soft and easily injured. Therefore, keeping this area dry can accelerate healing. Chemicals found in toilet tissues, laundry soaps and detergents that contact the vulva can cause irritation. Avoiding contact with potential irritants that contain chemicals will be important. Fabric softeners in undergarments, chemicals in deodorant soaps, bubble baths, feminine hygiene sprays and panty liners can all cause irritation.

-Wear white 100% cotton underwear, and do not wear pantyhose, tights, or other close-fitting clothes. Enclosing the vulva with synthetic fibers holds both heat and moisture in the skin which increases the development of infections. Tight fitting clothes may also increase vulvar pain and discomfort.

-After washing underwear, put it through at least one whole cycle with water only. Many women are sensitive to irritants in detergents whose residue was left in clothes by incomplete rinsing. Rinsing clothes thoroughly is more important than which detergent is used, although to be on the safe side, the milder the soap, the better. Wash new underwear before wearing. Fabric softeners and dryer sheets should not be used.

-Rinse skin off with plain water frequently. Use tap water, distilled water, sitz baths, squirt bottles, or bidets. Pat the skin dry gently, or dry with a cool hair dryer if you prefer.

-Use very mild soap for bathing. It is best not to use any soaps on the vulva. The vulva should be rinsed with warm water. Soaps that cause the least irritation to your skin and vulva are Neutrogena unscented face soap and unscented Dove bar soap. Frequent baths with soaps may increase irritation.

-A compress of Aveeno may be helpful if you are experiencing burning or itching or if you have discomfort after intercourse. You can place this over the vulva 3-4 times per day. You can make this by placing 2 tablespoons of Aveeno in 1 quart of water. Mix this together and refrigerate. You can place this on a clean washcloth and apply to the vulva.

-Use lubricants to make intercourse more enjoyable. Astroglide is the product that I most frequently recommend. It is water-based, lasts longer than other lubricants, and tends to not become sticky. It can be purchased at most Walgreens, CVS, etc or online. Other water-soluble lubricants include Replens, KY Jelly. Vegetable oils such as olive oil will also provide lubrication (but will stain fabrics!).

-Use 100% cotton menstrual pads and tampons. Many women with vulvar pain experience a significant increase in their symptoms with their periods when they use commercial paper pads or tampons. This can often be reduced by using 100% washable and reusable cotton menstrual pads. There are also some brands of disposable cotton pads available. You can find these products easily online. Pure cotton tampons are also available. If you choose to use commercial products, be aware that many women tend to have more irritation or sensitivity to Always menstrual pads.

-Don't sit or remain in a wet bathing suit or exercise gear for long periods

-Avoid condoms or spermicidal creams or gels if they cause irritation. But, please continue to use condoms if needed to protect yourself from unwanted pregnancy or STD's! Certain STD's may make your vulvar symptoms worse.

-Avoid wearing underwear or tight-fitting clothing at night to allow adequate exposure to the air.