

## Vulvar Hygiene Suggestions

The skin is a barrier to protect you from the outside environment. It is very important that this skin barrier be cared for in such a way that it is not injured. This is a list of simple measures to help relieve symptoms and prevent further irritation.

### LAUNDRY

Use a mild **enzyme free soap** (such as Woolite Gentle Cycle, All Free and Clear) on any clothing that comes in contact with the vulva, (use  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  the suggested amount per load). Other clothing may be washed in any soap.

1. Do not use fabric softener or dryer sheets on any clothing that contacts the vulva.
2. 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 assists in removing as much of the product as possible.

### CLOTHING

1. **Wear white, all cotton underpants** - not nylon with a cotton crotch. "Jockey for Her" and "Hanes Her Way" are two brands you may try and no thongs.
2. **Avoid pantyhose** - if you must wear them and they make you uncomfortable, cut the crotch out along the insert panel (leave about a  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of fabric from the seam to prevent running)
3. Avoid tight fitting and synthetic fabric clothing. Remove wet bathing and exercise clothing as soon as possible.

### BATHING & HYGIENE

1. **Avoid bath soaps, lotions, gels, etc. which contain perfumes** that can be irritating. This includes many baby and feminine hygiene products marketed as "gentle" and "mild". Dove & Neutrogena are some soaps we suggest.
2. **Avoid all bubble baths, bath salts, and scented oils.** You may use neutral, unscented, non-perfumed oils such as "Keri Oil" to damp skin after getting out of the bath. Do not apply directly to the vulva.
3. **Do not scrub the vulva skin with a washcloth-** washing with your hand is enough for good cleaning. While the skin is moist, use a lubricant to hold the moisture in the skin. Plain petrolatum (Vaseline, Aquaphot or coconut oil.) can be used to hold moisture in the skin or as a barrier.
4. **Pat dry or use of a hairdryer on a cool setting is better than rubbing with a towel.**
5. **Avoid over the counter ointments and creams unless told to use them.**
6. **Avoid douching.** Soaking in a bath of warm water (not hot) with 4 - 5 tablespoons of baking soda will help rinse away extra discharge or help with odor
7. **Soak in lukewarm bath water with 4 - 5 tablespoons of baking soda** to help soothe vulvar itching and burning. Soak 2 - 3 times a day for 10 - 15 minutes.
8. **Avoid deodorized pads and tampons.** Avoid daily use of panty liners, especially the brand "Always".
9. **Small amounts of "A & D" ointment** may be applied to the vulva as often as needed to protect the skin. It may decrease skin irritation during the period and when you urinate.
10. **Do not shave the vulvar area.** This can lead to irritation and infection.
11. **Use white, unscented toilet paper.**
12. **Avoid all feminine hygiene sprays, perfumes, adult, or baby wipes** use Water wipe brand only if needed. Pour luke warm water over the vulva after urination and pat dry with a dry cloth if vulvar burning occurs after urination.
13. **Larger women** may have problems with chronic dampness. Keeping dry is important. Use cotton fabrics when possible. Dry your body with a hairdryer on cool setting. **Avoid tight fitting clothes.**

14. **Use 100% cotton menstrual pads and tampons.**

15. **Avoid constipation by:** 1: adding fiber to the diet such as bran in Bran Buds or psyllium found in Metamucil. 2: Consider Seneca 3: Drink water daily 6-8 glasses to stay hydrated.

16. If you have a tendency to leak fecal material cleanse gently with either the Cetaphil lotion, mineral oil or Albolene Cleanser.

## **BIRTH CONTROL OPTIONS**

1. The new low dose birth control pills do not significantly increase most women's chances of yeast infections.
2. Contraceptive jellies, creams and sponges can cause burning & itching. A brand change sometimes helps
3. Pure vegetable oils like "Crisco" may help dryness with intercourse and lasts during sex and wash away with rinsing.

## **PHYSICAL EXERCISE**

1. Avoid exercise that puts direct pressure on the vulva- riding a horse, bike, etc.
2. Avoid exercise that creates friction in this area.
3. Avoid highly chlorinated pools.
4. Avoid hot tubs

## **EVERYDAY LIVING**

Consider relaxation techniques to do daily such as mindfulness, meditation, gentle yoga

### **Vulvar Pain & Itching**

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 strategies that can be used 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 (see the reverse side of this sheet). Avoiding contact with potential irritants that contain chemicals will be important. Wear white 100% cotton underwear, and do not wear pantyhose, tights, or other close-fitting clothes. Enclosing this area with synthetic fibers holds both heat and moisture in the skin, conditions which potentiate the development of secondary infections. Tight-fitting clothes may also increase your symptoms of discomfort.

After washing underwear, put it through at least one whole cycle with water only. Some women have suffered needlessly from 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. Baking soda for washing clothes is recommended by some people. Wash new underwear before wearing. Fabric softeners and drying sheets should not be used. Rinse skin off with plain water frequently. Use tap water, distilled water, spring water-bathtub baths, 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. Unscented Dove, Neutrogena, Basis, Pears (made in England), and castile soap with olive oil (Conti) are good soaps. They are found at pharmacies or health food stores. Remember that frequent baths with soaps may increase the irritation. You cannot wash away your symptoms.

A compress of oiled Aveeno (a powdered oatmeal bath treatment) has been recommended by some. It is placed over the vulva three to four times a day. Put two tablespoons of Aveeno in one quart of water. Mix in a jar and refrigerate. This is often helpful after intercourse or when symptoms are flaring. During intercourse use lubricants to make intercourse more comfortable such as; Crisco, Astroglide, Lubrin, Moistur-el, Replens and KY Jelly.

Some women find warmed soaked tea bags to be soothing to the vulva. The tea bag may be placed on menstrual pads to hold them in place. Another method is to steep tea bags in warm water and use them in a sitz bath.

Use 100% cotton menstrual pads and tampons. Many women with vulvar pain experience a significant increase in irritation and pain every month when they use commercial paper pads or tampons. This monthly increase in pain can often be reduced by using 100% washable and reusable cotton menstrual pads. Some disposable cotton pads are available. Pure cotton tampons are also available.

Don't sit or remain in a wet bathing suit. Avoid contraceptive devices and creams that can irritate sensitive tissues. Additionally, it is often recommended that the vulva is left uncovered at night (i.e. no underwear) to allow adequate exposure to the air.

Many of the disease processes will require a biopsy to diagnose your condition. If a biopsy is performed during your visit, after care is important. Keep the area clean and dry. Avoid application of creams or ointments to the biopsy site. Sitz baths twice a day for three or four days following the biopsy will aid in healing. If increase redness, severe pain, heavy discharge, or heavy bleeding occurs at the biopsy site, call for further instructions. Avoid intercourse until the biopsy site is healed.

Contact irritants may require low dose, short course topical steroids or topical anesthetics. If this is prescribed use only as instructed.