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Guidelines for Vulvar Skin Care

Department of Nursing: Children's and Women's Services/ OB-GYN Patient
Education Committee

NOTE: The goal is to promote healthy vulvar skin. This is done by decreasing and/or removing any chemicals, moisture, or rubbing (friction). Any products listed below have been suggested for use because of their past success in helping to decrease or relieve vulvar/vaginal itching and burning.

LAUNDRY PRODUCTS

1. Use a detergent free of dyes, enzymes and perfumes (such as ALL-Free and Clear or Earth-Rite) on any clothing that comes in contact with our vulva such as underwear, exercise clothes, towels, or pajama bottoms. Use 1/3 to 1/2 the suggested amount per load. Other clothing may be washed in the laundry soap of your choice.
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.
3. 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

1. Wear white all cotton underwear, not nylon with a cotton crotch. Cotton allows air in and moisture out.
2. Avoid pantyhose. If you must wear them, either cut out the diamond crotch (if you cut out the 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. Many stores now carry thigh high nylons.
3. Avoid tight clothing, especially clothing made of synthetic fabrics. Remove wet bathing and exercise clothing as soon as you can.

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". Dove-hypoallergenic, Neutrogena, Basis, or Pears are the soaps we suggest. 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.

2. **Avoid all bubble baths, bath salts, and scented oils.** You may apply a neutral (unscented, non perfumed) oil such as Keri Oil to damp skin after getting out of the tub or shower. Do not apply oils directly to the vulva.
3. **Do not scrub vulvar skin with a washcloth,** washing with your hand and warm water is enough for good cleaning.
4. **Pat dry rather than rubbing with a towel.** Or use a hairdryer on a cool setting to dry the vulva.
5. **Baking soda soaks.** Soak in lukewarm (not hot) bath water with 4-5 tablespoons of baking soda to help soothe vulvar itching and burning. Soak 1-3 times a day for 10-15 minutes.
6. **Use white, unscented toilet paper.** If paper has a perfumed scent or lotion, avoid using it.
7. **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. Pat dry rather than rubbing with a towel.
8. **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. Tampons are safe for most women, but wearing them too long or when the blood flow is light may result in 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.
9. **Avoid all over the counter creams or ointments,** except A&D Ointment. Ask your health care provider first.
10. **Small amounts of A&D Ointment may be applied to your vulva as often as needed to protect the skin.** It may also help to decrease skin irritation during your period and when you urinate. Brands that have been helpful are the Fougere brand and Toys R Us brand, Rugby brand, or NMC brand.
11. **DO NOT DOUCHE.** Baking soda will help rinse away extra discharge and help with odor.
12. **DO NOT SHAVE** the vulvar area.
13. Some women may have problems with **chronic dampness.** Keeping dry is important.
 - a. Choose cotton fabrics when possible
 - b. Keep an extra pair of underwear with you in a small bag and change if you become damp during the day at work/school.
 - c. 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.
14. **Dryness and Irritation during intercourse** may be helped by using a lubricant. Use a small amount of a pure vegetable oil such as Crisco (solid or oil). The vegetable oils contain no chemicals to irritate vulvar/vaginal skin. Vegetable oils will rinse away with water and will not increase your chances of infection. Water-based products like K-Y Jelly are helpful, but may tend to dry before intercourse is over and also contain chemicals that can irritate your vulvar skin. It may be helpful to use non-lubricated, non-spermicidal condom, and use vegetable oil as the lubricant. This will help keep the semen off the skin which can decrease burning and irritation after intercourse.

BIRTH CONTROL OPTIONS

1. The new low-dose oral birth control pills do not increase your chances of getting a yeast infection.

2. Lubricated condoms, contraceptive jellies, creams, or sponges may cause itching and burning. Ask you health care provider for help.
3. The use of latex condoms with a vegetable oil as a lubricant (#14 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 experiences has not found this to be a problem with vegetable based oils. However, the centers for disease control recommends that condoms not be used with any oil based lubricants for birth control or prevention of sexually transmitted disease.

See related Patient Textbooks about Obstetrics and Gynecology

See related Patient Topics Gynecology, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Vaginal Diseases or Womens Health

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