

Taking care of your vulval skin

Gynaecology

Introduction

This leaflet has been designed to help you care for your vulval skin.

What is the vulva?

This is the area in between the tops of the inner thighs from the pubic bone to the anus. It is the area where the outer genital area in women is found.

Why take care of vulval skin?

The skin of the vulva can be very sensitive and problems with irritation or itching are very common. Taking care of the skin can significantly improve symptoms. Harsh washing and cleansing of the vulva can make it dry, irritated, sore and itchy. This is more of a problem as you get older. Harsh washing will also make any vulval skin conditions worse.

What are the Do's and Do not's?

Washing and hygiene

Do

- Use a small amount of soap substitute such as Oilatum or Cetraben cream to clean the vulval skin with just your hand
- Dry the vulval area by gently dabbing with a soft towel
- Take showers rather than baths
- Add a bath emollient such as Oilatum and Cetraben to bath water
- Wash your underwear separately with a non-biological powder or gel
- Use white toilet paper

Do not

- Wash using water alone as it will dry the skin more
- Over-clean the vulva, as it will dry the skin more
- Use flannels or sponges to wash the vulva
- Use wipes, douches or feminine hygiene products

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

- Wash underwear with fabric conditioner and biological washing powders or gel
- Use coloured or scented toilet paper
- Soak in the bath or the shower

What to wear?

Do

- Wear loose-fitting cotton or silk underwear
- Wear loose-fitting trousers or skirts and replace tights with stockings
- At home, you may find it more comfortable to wear long skirts without underwear
- Sleep without underwear
- Wear white / light-coloured underwear.

Do not

- Wear close-fitting clothes like tights, cycling shorts, tight jeans and leggings
- Sleep with underwear
- Wear dark-coloured underwear like black and navy which may contain textile dyes
- Wear panty liners or sanitary towels daily

What creams can I use?

Do

- Use emollients as moisturisers throughout the day. These products can be bought in 500g tubs or in 100g tubes over the counter or on prescription from your GP
- Use moisturiser every day. It can help reduce recurrence even when you do not have symptoms. It will protect the skin and help prevent flare-ups
- Find the moisturiser that suits you best. If the first one you try does not work well, it is well worth trying another one
- If your skin is irritated, consider keeping your moisturiser in the fridge so that if your skin is irritated, you can dab on cool and soothe the skin as often as you like

Do not

- Use some over-the-counter creams including, baby or nappy creams, herbal creams such as tea tree oils, aloe vera and thrush treatments
- Use wipes, douches or feminine hygiene products
- Use antiseptic creams or liquids added to bath water

What should I avoid?

Some women may have sensitivity or allergy to the following and thus avoiding contact with these substances will help:

- Latex
- Nail polish
- Lubricants
- Perfumed products
- Anti-fungal or thrush creams / pessaries
- Antiseptics
- Semen

When should I seek help?

See your doctor if any of the following arise:

- Severe persistent itching or burning
- The discharge that is normal for you changes
- Unexpected bleeding occurs with or without sex
- Any ulcers or blisters form on the skin
- Any new lumps or change in the shape of the vulva
- Anything that you are anxious about

Frequently asked questions

What is an emollient?

This is a moisturiser that can come as a soap substitute, bath oil or moisturiser cream or ointment. Examples are Diprobase, Oilatum and Cetraben.

Are steroid creams dangerous?

These are quite safe when used correctly. Some may cause irritation; if this happens ask your doctor for advice.

Is it safe to have intercourse?

It is safe to have intercourse as long as it is not painful. It may be helpful to use a non-irritating lubricant, especially designed for sexual intercourse. You can buy one of these over the counter in a chemist shop or pharmacy.

References

Management of Vulval disorders: Royal College of Obstetrics & Gynaecology

Contact details:

If you have any queries or worries, contact your GP or the secretary of the consultant whose clinic you attended when you were given this leaflet (via switchboard 01902 307999).

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。