

Guidelines for Vulvar Skin Care

Our goal is to promote healthy vulvar skin. This is done by decreasing and/or removing any chemicals, moisture and friction (rubbing). Any products listed have been suggested for use because of their past success in achieving this goal.

Laundry Products

- **Use a detergent free of dyes, enzymes and perfumes** (All Free, Tide Free, etc.) on anything that comes in contact with your vulva such as underwear, pants, towels, or pajama bottoms. Use 1/3 to ½ the amount recommended, esp. in top-load washers which leave significant detergent residue.
- **DO NOT use fabric softener.** This does not get rinsed out of items and leaves irritating residue. **Try dissolving ½ cup of baking soda in your water** first: this is an irritant-free fabric softener.
- **DO NOT use dryer sheets.** They also leave an irritating residue full of chemicals. **Try Meyer's brand Aromatherapeutic Dryer Sheets in combination with dryer balls.** These will add a natural, chemical free scent and decrease static as well as dry your clothes faster (Bed Bath and Beyond, Target, and similar stores generally carry these items).'
- **If you use a stain removing product on undergarments, rinse them** well by hand, then wash them to remove as much of the product as possible.

Hair removal/Shaving

DO NOT remove hair completely from the vulvar area! Leave a small strip down the middle if you need to remove hair for other purposes (swimming, etc).

- **There are medical purposes to this hair!**
 - It decreases friction/irritation,
 - It gives off pheromones
 - It keeps moisture from being trapped against your skin (remember what skin looks like after a bandaid is on it for a couple of days? Think of your vulvar skin trapped with tight clothing and no room to breathe or distribute the moisture).

Removing hair completely will increase your risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection.

Why?

- Because there is more friction and irritation, which has been proven to cause increased STI transmission.
- Because it opens pores and therefore causes little breaks in the skin where STI's can enter the skin
- Shaving in particular can spread an STI once you have it, even before you have symptoms! (imagine a small area of warts or herpes that is now spread to other open pores and can enter other areas of skin)

Washing: Water is really all you need to keep the vulvar area clean and healthy.

- **Do not use soap directly on vulvar skin.** Warm water and your hand will keep the area clean, while maintaining the natural pH of the vulvar area, to keep it healthy.
- **Do not use ANY feminine, hygiene washes, sprays, adult or baby wipe, "body wash" or any scented cleanser or wipe in the area.** If you want to use soap in the area, try unscented Dove.
- **Do not use antibacterial soaps:** these upset the normal, health bacteria that are needed in the area.

- **Do not use bubble baths, bath salts, or scented oils.** Use Baking Soda, 4-5 tablespoons in warm water bath if you need to soothe the area.
- **Do not rub the area with a washcloth or towel.** Pat it dry or use a hairdryer on cool if you need to dry or decrease the moisture in the area.

General Hygiene

- **DO NOT douche!!** Baking soda soaks as mentioned above can help if you have odor.
- **Use unscented tampons, pads, and toilet paper.** Many women are sensitive to the “weave” of the Always pads. Consider New Freedom or a hypoallergenic cotton pad/tampon. **Change them often and regularly.** Try spritzing a hypoallergenic/aromatherapeutic spray on your legs or under skirts, if you want a general scent in the area.
- **Avoid all over the counter creams or ointments except A & D Ointment or Liquid Silk (see below).** These can be used as needed to decrease friction and soothe the area if you have irritation.

Clothing

- **Wear white, all cotton underwear:** not even a trace of lycra; not “Coolmax” or other supposed moisture wicking synthetic fabrics.
- **Avoid tight clothing and panty hose as much as possible.** If you must wear them, wear cotton underwear under them and change into loose clothing in the evening (loose all-cotton pants, or a cotton skirt/dress without undergarments for awhile. Consider thigh-high hose.
- **Change out of damp or wet clothing after swimming or exercise,** even if you are taking a break and plan to return to the activity later in the day.
- **Keep an extra pair of underwear** with you if you tend to become damp, esp. during hot months.

Avoiding dryness and irritation during intercourse:

- **We do not recommend condoms with spermicide.** These have been shown to cause irritation that can increase STI transmission, in particular, HIV.
- **Use a hypoallergenic water based lubricant such as “Liquid Silk.”** You need to purchase this online or at a store such as Whole Foods, or similar local natural stores and pharmacies. It will not rub off like KY Jelly will but instead it is absorbed into the local tissue to decrease irritation and moisturize/soothe the area. It’s more expensive but a little bit will last a very long time, and should be worth the comfort it will provide.

Nutrition:

In general, a healthy diet high in natural fiber and low in added sugars (fruit doesn’t count – this is healthy “sugar”) will help maintain a healthy state.

- Eating probiotic containing yogurt or other foods may help if you are prone to yeast infections
- Maintain hydration with 6-12 glasses (6-8 oz) of water per day!
- If you have been diagnosed with vestibulitis, a low-oxalate diet may help relieve symptoms (talk to your doctor or medical provider before limiting healthy foods)

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