

VULVO – VAGINAL CARE

The skin of the vulva and vagina is very sensitive and needs to be carefully looked after. The rule should be 'less is more' with regard to this area of your body.

WASHING AND HYGIENE

- The vagina is a self-cleansing organ, with a very fine balance of organisms and pH levels, which protect the area. It does not need to be cleansed inside, as it is already a self-cleaning organ. In fact, by douching the area you are destroying the body's natural delicate defense mechanisms. Cleansing can cause problems due to irritation and allergic reaction. Washing too often and rubbing too hard can damage the skin.
- Avoid putting anything unnecessary on the area, including soaps, cleansers, shower gels, wet wipes, bubble bath, deodorants, creams, perfumes and powders. Often the more fragrant the product the more irritating it can be. Many 'feminine hygiene products' are marketed specifically for cleaning this area, but they can cause problems, and should be avoided.
- Consult your chemist about available non-fragranced soap substitutes e.g. QV wash[®] or Cetaphil[®]. A good alternative is to wash with sorbolene cream. Simple warm water is likely to be the least problematic.
- Always pat dry the area after washing, to ensure it is completely dry.
- Toilet paper can also cause problems, so try to find a hypoallergenic brand.
- Use a mild or hypoallergenic washing detergent for your clothes, and avoid fabric softener.

SELF TREATMENT

- It is very tempting to try and self treat any symptoms in the area. However, many 'treatments' cause problems in themselves e.g. over the counter creams and pessaries such as those used for thrush. Avoid tea tree oil, vinegar, etc. When looking at a product – the more ingredients (preservatives and active ingredients) listed in the content, then the more potential for irritation or allergy.
- Do not scratch the area, as this causes more irritation and leads to a vicious itch-scratch cycle.
- Application of a cool pack or salt bath (1/4 cup of salt to a warm water bath) can be soothing.

CLOTHING

- Avoid tight synthetic material e.g. G strings, pantyhose and tight clothing. Cotton underwear is best.

MENSTRUATION

- Sanitary pads can cause problems as they are treated with chlorine. They also have a plastic backing, which locks in heat and moisture creating an environment for organisms to flourish. Use tampons if possible, otherwise change your sanitary pads regularly.

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

- Try to avoid sexual intercourse when you have pain or discomfort in the area.
- Latex condoms can cause allergies and irritation.
- Always ensure there is enough lubrication during sexual intercourse. If necessary use a water based or silicone lubricant. Avoid petroleum-based lubricants. Natural oils like olive oil can also be used if condoms aren't required.

EXERCISE

- Chlorinated swimming pools can cause allergies. Rinse the area immediately and thoroughly after swimming. If necessary consider applying a barrier cream to the area before swimming, to avoid exposing the skin to chlorine.
- Beware of exercise that locks in moisture or applies an increased amount of pressure or friction on the area eg. bike riding, horse riding.

MORE INFORMATION

See our website and News and Resources:

- Painful sex
- Pudendal neuralgia
- CO₂ Fractional laser treatment for vulvo-vaginal atrophy