

## Vulvar Care for Itching

The skin around the vagina (the vulva) is some of the most sensitive skin on the body. Normally, this skin is coated with natural body oils and emollients, which form a protective barrier. However soap and water can wash away this natural protection, leaving skin exposed to irritation from shaving, chemicals, detergents and hygiene products. This usually causes irritation and itching. Often women think itching must be caused by an infection, but if you don't have an odor or unusual discharge and the itching is primarily on the outside, it may just be due to irritation. Of course, if you may have been exposed to an STD or have other symptoms you should contact us. But if it is just irritation try these simple steps for relief.

### GUIDELINES FOR VULVAR SKIN CARE

#### Clothing and Laundry

- \* Wear all-white cotton underwear and loose-fitting pants or skirts
- \* Avoid wearing pantyhose (wear thigh/knee highs instead or cut out the diamond-shaped crotch)
- \* Remove wet bathing suits and exercise clothing promptly
- \* Use mild, dye and perfume-free detergents such as Cheer-Free or All-Free to launder your clothes.
- \* Do not use fabric softener or anti-cling agents on undergarments
- \* Double-rinse underwear and other clothing that touches vulva

#### Bathing and Hygiene:

The most important thing is DO NOT SCRATCH. This irritates the skin further and causes more itching.

- \* Do not use bath soaps, lotions or gels that contain perfumes. Dove, Neutrogena and Aveeno are the most gentle. Do not use soap or let shampoo fall directly on the vulvar skin. Just warm water and your hand will keep the area clean without skin irritation.
- \* Do not use bubble bath, bath salts or scented oils. Don't apply lotion directly to vulva.
- \* Do not scrub vulvar skin with a washcloth.
- \* Pat dry rather than rubbing dry with towel. Or use a hairdryer on low setting.
- \* Use white unscented toilet paper.
- \* If the skin is very irritated, you may wish to rinse the vulva with cool or lukewarm water after urination.
- \* Do not use feminine hygiene sprays, adult or baby wipes.
- \* Do not use deodorized pads or tampons. Use pads that have a cotton liner that comes in contact with your skin.

- \* Do not use over the counter creams or ointments, except Vaseline, A&D or zinc oxide ointment. Make sure they are paraben and fragrance free.
  - \* A small amount of A&D, olive oil, vegetable oil or zinc oxide ointment may be applied to vulva as often as needed to protect the skin.
  - \* Do not douche, shave or use hair removing products to vulvar area. You may clip to trim.
  - \* Avoid contraceptive creams/spermicides
- 14) Water-soluble lubricants such as Astroglide can help with dryness and irritation during intercourse.

**Physical Activity:**

- \* Avoid exercises that put direct pressure on vulva (e.g. biking, horseback riding)
- \* Limit intense exercises that create a lot of friction in vulvar area
- \* Don't swim in highly chlorinated pools and avoid use of hot tubs

**Remedies:**

- \* Vaseline or 1% hydrocortisone ointment to use 2-3 times daily. Don't use the cream as this is alcohol-based and dries the skin.
- \* If you find yourself scratching at night, try putting layers of clothing between your hands and skin with nightclothes or cotton gloves or socks on your hands. Taking a 25 mg Benadryl tablet at night can reduce itching.
- \* To restore normal vaginal pH balance to minimize infection and symptoms - RepHresh or Luvena vaginal gels which can be purchased over the counter at outside pharmacies