

# Caring for your vulva

Information for you



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Vulva is the name for the external female genital organs.

Many things can cause your vulva to become irritated. Whatever the cause there are a number of things that you can do to help reduce the symptoms.

## **Washing**

- Do not use soap, bubble bath or shower gel when you wash.
- Do not add anything to your bath water – for example, aromatherapy oils or disinfectant.
- Have a shower rather than a bath.
- Clean your vulval area only once a day, as over cleaning can aggravate your symptoms.
- Try washing your hair over the side of the bath or in the sink so that shampoo does not run down into your genital area.

## **Emollient**

- You should use an emollient – for example, Diprobase or Doublebase instead of soap, as only washing with water can make your skin dry and itchy.
- Your family doctor (GP) can prescribe you this in a pump dispenser which is more hygienic than a pot.
- Put the cream on before you bath or shower so that it acts as a barrier while you wash elsewhere. Rinse it away with water.
- Avoid using a flannel or sponge to clean the area. You can apply the emollient directly by hand.
- Use the emollient as a moisturiser to soothe your skin. You can do this as often as you need to.
- You can keep the emollient in the fridge to make it feel cool.

## **Clothing**

- To reduce sweating, wear stockings instead of tights, and skirts instead of trousers.
- Wear loose fitting cotton or silk underwear next to the skin whenever possible, as this absorbs moisture best.

- Wear white or light colours of underwear. Dark textile dyes (black or navy) may cause an allergy. If you wash new dark underwear a few times before wearing it, it will be less likely to cause a problem.
- Sleep without underwear.
- Avoid washing your underwear with biological washing powder or fabric softener. If possible, wash your underwear separately from the rest of your clothing in a non-fragranced, non-biological washing powder and make sure the clothes are rinsed well.
- Avoid wearing pyjamas and wash nightwear in non-biological washing powder.

## **Toilet**

- If it is painful to pass urine when your vulva is inflamed, apply Vaseline to the area first or pour some warm water over your vulva.
- Avoid coloured toilet paper. If your vulva is very sensitive, you may use a small amount of emollient on the paper when you are cleaning yourself.
- Do not use fragranced wipes, deodorant sprays or douches on the vulva (even if advertised as being suitable for this purpose).

## Sanitary pads

- Avoid wearing panty liners or sanitary towels on a regular basis.
- Try to use pads without bleach, preservatives or perfumes - these can sometimes be the cheaper simpler products. Do not use toilet paper instead of a pad.
- It may be worthwhile considering alternatives to traditional pads or tampons.

## Cosmetics

- Avoid wearing nail varnish on finger nails if you tend to scratch your skin.
- Fragranced products elsewhere on the body can also irritate the skin around your genitals. Try using fragrance free products, including deodorant and hair products.
- Do not use talcum powder as this can irritate your skin.
- Trim pubic hair rather than shaving.

**Let your doctor know if you have any problems with incontinence, as they may be able to help.**

**Useful websites:**

- [www.vulvalpainsociety.org](http://www.vulvalpainsociety.org)
- [www.bssvd.org](http://www.bssvd.org)

## Your notes

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