



GUIDE



Vulvar Care



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Disclaimer

This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified healthcare provider. Please consult your own personal physician who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.

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Vulvar Care

This booklet offers suggestions on how to care for the vulva. It discusses ways to minimize or eliminate symptoms such as pain, itchiness and burning of the vulva.

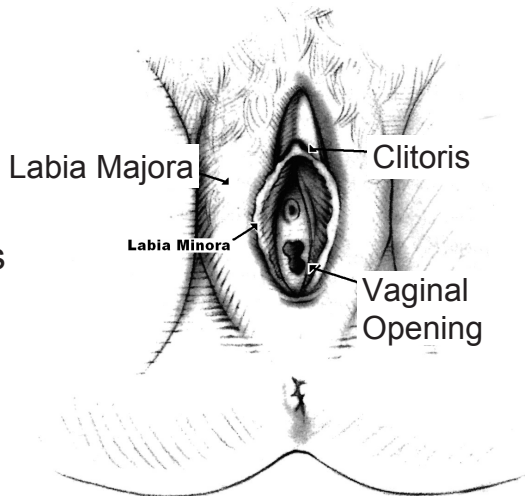
There are different reasons that you may be experiencing these symptoms. If these symptoms interfere with your daily activities consult your physician.

As you read the booklet, note any questions that come to mind. There is a blank page at the end of the booklet for this purpose.

Please discuss them with your physician or nurse.

What is the Vulva?

The vulva is the outside part of a woman's genital organs. It includes the labia minora, labia majora, clitoris and vaginal opening. Another name for the vulva is the perineum. The skin of the vulva is delicate and requires care to avoid irritation and discomfort.



Vulvar Hygiene

Avoid all perfumed products such as soaps, shampoos, bath oils, bubble baths, feminine hygiene sprays, moisturizing lotions or creams.

Wash with water frequently. You can use a squirt bottle after going to the bathroom and dry gently by patting rather than wiping.

Wipe yourself from front to back.

Do not use toilet paper made of recycled paper, the recycling process uses harsh chemicals.

If you feel that you must use a cleanser, use an unscented, soap-free skin cleanser or mild soap once a day only. Make certain that you rinse thoroughly.

Do not use vaginal douches.

Enjoy baths at a moderate temperature.

When washing your hair in the shower, shampoo often runs down to the vulvar area. Make sure that the vulva is well rinsed of shampoo.

Use white towels or washcloths. Keep your towel and washcloth separate from others.

Always dry the vulva thoroughly.

Clothing, Sanitary Napkins and Tampons

Wash laundry with gentle unscented soaps or those that have been approved by dermatologists. Do not use anything labeled “whiter” or “brighter” or “improved”. They often contain harsher chemicals.

Avoid all perfumed detergents, fabric softeners, dryer sheets and bleaches.

Always wear white cotton underwear, not simply a cotton gusset line. Synthetic underpants don't allow good air circulation.

Wash new underwear before wearing them.

Do not wear underwear at night.

Wear loose clothing, preferably made of natural material products such as cotton, wool and linen. Natural fabrics allow better air circulation to the skin.

Avoid pantyhose or panty girdles.

Avoid dressing too warmly.

Use sanitary napkins or panty liners only when you are menstruating. Using panty liners daily will cause irritation. Consider changing underwear more frequently instead of using liners.

Use cotton, unscented, non-deodorized sanitary napkins and tampons. Avoid “dry weave”, it is a plastic lining used in some sanitary napkins.

Change sanitary napkins and tampons frequently.

Do not shave or wax the vulva.

Heat and Moisture

Avoid excess heat; it can cause moisture and humidity to irritate the vulva.

Do not use a plastic mattress cover, electric blanket or waterbed.

Do not cross your legs or remain sitting for a long period of time.

Hot Tubs and Swimming Pools

Chemicals are used to keep hot tubs and swimming pools free of bacteria.

Consider avoiding hot tubs and swimming pools if you have an itch or irritation on the vulva.

Change out of swimsuits soon after swimming. Rinse and dry the vulva thoroughly.

Sexual Practices

If a lubricant is used during sexual intercourse, chose a water-soluble one that is free of added colour or perfumes. Your physician can recommend one for you.

Contraceptive spermicides, mousses, foams, sponges and condoms can cause irritation. If you have a sensitivity or allergy to any of these, you may have to consider another form of birth control.

If you use a diaphragm, vaginal dilators or “sex toy”, make sure to clean them well with gentle soap and water after every use. Rinse and dry well.

Saliva, beards and mustaches may cause irritation.

Never have genital contact after anal contact.

After sexual intercourse always wash and dry the vulva area.

After sexual intercourse always empty your bladder. This helps flush away any germs that may enter into your urethra and bladder, thus preventing bladder infections.

If you have a mild itch/irritation, which seems to temporarily respond to “over the counter” antifungal/yeast medications, you may have an allergy/sensitivity to some local products rather than a yeast infection.

There are many reasons and conditions that cause irritation, pain and discomfort of the vulva. If you experience any of these symptoms, notice a discoloration of the skin or lump in the vulvar area, consult your physician.

If You Have Incontinence

Use protective pads designed for incontinence, they are meant to absorb urine. You will probably notice less odour and skin irritation, if you use these products instead of using pads designed to absorb menstrual blood.

Change soiled pads and undergarments promptly. Wash any skin that has come in contact with urine with gentle pH balanced cleansers, (or use a no-rinse perineal cleanser) rinse and dry well. Fragrances, alcohol, and alkaline soaps should be avoided.

Use disposable wipes or wash clothes after emptying your bladder or bowels, they are more gentle than toilet tissue. Always wash from front to back.

Consider using a **moisturizer** (moisturizers either seal in existing moisture, or add moisture to the skin, they include creams, lotions or pastes) or a **barrier** product (barrier products protect skin from contact with moisture, and decrease friction from protective pads.) Use products designed for incontinence, they are available at most major drugstores. **Apply to clean skin only.**

Do not use barrier products if you are using antifungal creams.

Inform your doctor of any products you use on the vulva.

