

Vulvar Skin Facts & Guidelines

Compared to other skin surfaces, the vulvar skin reacts more intensely to irritants, and the skin barrier is weaker. The surface must be kept moist and pliable. Naturally, it will usually stay this way (i.e., leaving it alone). A common myth is the vulva “is dirty” and patient attempts to clean it often leads to problems.

The goal is to promote healthy vulvar skin. This is done by decreasing and removing chemicals, moisture or rubbing (friction). Here are some suggested products and practices. The most important of which is good nutrition (low sugar, fresh fruits, and vegetables).

Alastin® Recovery Balm

This skincare product can be helpful to soothe and heal the vulva when irritated. It keeps the vulva moist and lubricated which can decrease irritations and is excellent as a barrier against pads/clothing. It can be used as often as desired. Alastin® Recovery Balm is available for purchase in Dr. Schultis’ office.

BATHING

- **Do Not** use bath soaps, lotions, or gels that have perfumes. These may smell nice, but they can be irritating.
 - Many baby products and feminine hygiene products marked “gentle” or “mild” can have perfumes
- We suggest you and all sexual partners use these soaps:
 - Dove for Sensitive Skin™
 - Neutrogena™
 - Basis™
 - Aveeno™
 - Pears™
- **Do Not** use soap directly on the vulvar skin.
 - Use warm water, not hot and your hand to keep the vulvar area clean without irritating the skin.
- **Do Not** use bubble bath, bath salts and scented oils.
- **Do Not** put lotion on your vulva.
- **Do Not** scrub vulvar skin with a washcloth. Wash with your hand and warm water.
- Pat dry rather than rubbing with a towel or use a hair dryer on a cool setting to dry the vulva.

SOAKS (if having vulvar “irritation)

- Soak in lukewarm (not hot) water with (4 to 5 tablespoons of baking soda) or (1 tsp salt to 3 cups water) to help soothe vulvar itching and burning.
- Soak 1 to 3 times a day for 10 minutes.
- After the soak to stop water loss and seal in moisture use:
 - Alastin® (preferably) or plain petroleum
 - If you have active ulcerations, Alastin® or Zinc Oxide 20% ointment
 - Add estrogen cream to help the barrier function if appropriate in your situation

HYGIENE

- Use white, unscented toilet paper.
 - **Do Not** use toilet paper with aloe.
 - Pat dry instead of wiping
- **Do Not** douche (unless directed to by office). Baking soda soaps or rinsing with warm water will help rinse away extra discharge and help with odor.

- **Do Not** shave or use hair removal products on the vulvar area.
 - You may use scissors to trim the pubic hair close to the vulva.
 - You can choose to have laser hair removal.
- **Do Not** use feminine hygiene sprays, perfumes, adult or baby wipes
 - You can use Tucks (witch hazel) hemorrhoid pads. Pour out the extra witch hazel and put mineral oil into the container.
 - You can use WaterWipes™.
 - If urinating causes your skin to feel like burning, pour lukewarm water over the vulva while you urinate to dilute the urine.
- **Do Not** use deodorized pads and tampons.
- Unscented tampons are preferred over pads and change often.
- Use pads that have a cotton liner that touches your skin.
 - **Do not** use pads with a nylon mesh weave. Nylon traps moisture. It keeps blood and discharge against your skin longer.
 - We suggest using Stayfree™, Carefree™, or 7th Generation™.
 - For urine leakage, use a pad designed to collect urine.
 - Try organic pads or reusable cloth pads
 - Change often
 - Try menstrual cup
 - If have incontinence, use pads designed for such and use barrier creams (Alastin® or 20% Zinc Oxide ointment, Boudreaux's Butt Paste)

Ointments and Creams

- **Do Not** use over-the-counter creams or ointments unless approved by your health care provider.
 - Buy ointments that are paraben-free and fragrance-free.
- You can use a skin protectant on your vulva as often as you need. We suggest that you use a thin layer of:
 - Alastin® is preferred (available in Dr. Schultis' office)
 - Coconut oil
 - Zinc oxide ointment
 - White petroleum (Vaseline™)
- You can put this on as often as you need to protect the skin.
- It also helps to lower skin irritation during your period and when you urinate.

Staying Dry

For women who have problems with chronic dampness:

- **Do not** wear pads daily.
- Choose cotton fabrics when you can.
- Keep an extra pair of underwear with you and change if you become damp.
- Alastin®, Gold Bond™ or Zeasorb (AF)™ powder may be put on the vulva and groin area (or in underwear) 1 to 2 times per day to help absorb moisture

LAUNDRY PRODUCTS

- Use the detergent brand All Free Clear™ on all laundry that goes into your washer.
 - Use it for each load all the time. **Do Not** use other detergents or substitute back and forth with others.
 - Use 1/3 to 1/2 of the suggested amount of detergent per load.
 - If you have a high efficiency washer, use the smallest amount of detergent you can. Rinse your clothes 2x.

- **Do not** use fabric softeners or dryer sheets in the washer or dryer. Even those that advertise as “free”.
 - You can use dryer balls to help soften clothes.
 - **Do Not** use wool dryer balls.
- You must hand wash your underwear if you use a shared washer or dryer (such as a laundromat, apartment or dorm).
 - Use All Free Clear™ and line dry your underwear

Stain Removing Products and Bleach

If you have used a stain removing product:

- Soak and rinse in clear water all underwear and towels which you have used.
- Then wash in your regular washing cycle using All Free Clear™.
- This removes as much of the product as you can.

CLOTHING

- Wear ventilated, well fitted clothing.
- Wear white, all cotton underwear. Cotton lets air in and moisture out.
- **Do Not** wear nylon underwear with a cotton crotch.
- **Do Not** wear thongs, girdles.
- **Do Not** wear underwear when sleeping at night. Loose fitting cotton boxers or cotton pajama bottoms are fine.
- **Do Not** wear pantyhose.
- If you must wear pantyhose:
 - Cut out the diamond crotch. Be sure to leave ¼ inch of fabric from the seam to keep it from running.
 - Wear thigh high hose. Many stores now carry thigh high hose.
- **Do Not** wear tight clothing, mainly clothing made of synthetic fabrics.
- Take off wet bathing and exercise clothing as soon as you can.

SEX

- You can help dryness and irritation during sex by using a lubricant. Coconut oil works well or silicone-based lubricants such as Uberlube™.
- Over-the-counter water-based lubricants tend to dry out before sex is over.
 - This can cause small tears in your vagina.
 - They may have chemicals that can irritate your vulvar skin.
- It may be helpful to use a latex, non-lubricated, non-spermicidal condom, and use coconut oil as the lubricant. This will help keep the semen off the skin and can decrease burning and irritation after sex.

BIRTH CONTROL OPTIONS

- Low-dose oral birth control pills **do not** raise your chances of getting a yeast infection.
- Lubricated and/or spermicidal condoms, contraceptive jellies, creams, or sponges may cause itching and burning.
- We suggest you use latex condoms with coconut oil as a lubricant to protect your skin.