

Care of the Vulval Skin

An information guide



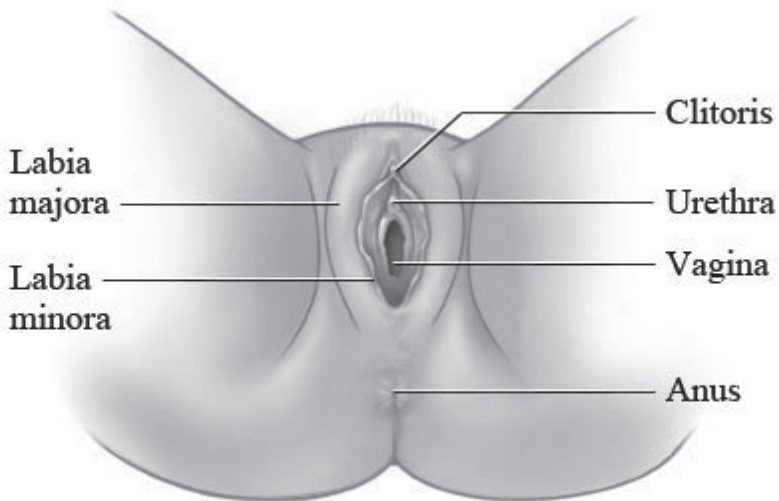
Care of the Vulval Skin

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet gives general vulval skin care advice for women who have a diagnosed vulval skin condition. It may also be helpful for women who experience vulval symptoms such as itch and soreness. Although it does not give specific details about treatment for your condition, following the advice below helps most women.

What do we mean by the vulva?

The vulva is the name of the area around the opening of the vagina. The vulval (vulvar in USA) skin is very sensitive. It can react to irritants such as soaps and a whole range of other substances that cause allergies. To protect the vulval skin and to improve your symptoms the following simple steps are important.



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Examine yourself

The best time to do this is soon after you have been seen in clinic. Put the toilet seat down, put a mirror on top of it (a magnifying makeup mirror can be helpful) and then straddle this. You will then have your hands free to apply creams or have a better look.

Washing

Avoid all contact with soap as this dries and irritates the skin. This includes simple soap and shower gel. You may find it beneficial to wash your hair separately from the rest of your body as shampoo can irritate vulval skin.

Use a soap substitute such as, **Hydromol or Dermol 500** for washing. A small amount of the cream or ointment is applied to the skin with water and then washed off. This will leave the skin feeling less dry and irritated than using soap or water alone. It can be used anywhere on the body. Frequent use is quite safe and quite beneficial.

Avoid using hard, scratchy flannels for washing the vulva and use your hand to apply the aqueous cream for washing. Dab the vulval area gently to dry or try using a hairdryer on a cool setting and held well away from the skin.

Avoid washing too often, once a day is usually adequate. Avoid bubble bath or other additives in your bath. Wet wipes of any sort can be very irritating and should be avoided.

Clothing

Always wear loose fitting underwear, try to avoid tight outer garments such as tight jeans or leggings. On the whole, cotton underwear tends to be less irritating than synthetic ones.

You may find it more comfortable to wear long skirts and no underwear when at home.

Avoid washing underwear in biological washing powders. Wash and rinse these items separately from your main wash.

Moisturisers

Both **Hydromol** and **Diprobase** can be used as moisturisers at any time of the day. Both products can be bought over the counter. Either can be kept in the fridge and dabbed on to cool and soothe the skin as often as necessary.

Some women also find the use of Vaseline to be very beneficial.

Both can also be very helpful and soothing for cleaning the anal area after bowel motions, applied to toilet tissue before use, it can help to ease that "scratchy feeling" toilet tissue has on sensitive and damaged skin.

It is important that you avoid contact with other non-prescribed products that may make your skin condition worse. In particular this applies to perfumed products, personal deodorants and wet wipes.

Is there anything else I should know?

If you enjoy playing sports or taking part in fitness activities, these can normally be continued.

Activities that put direct pressure on the vulva, such as cycling or horse riding, are likely to make your symptoms worse. We would advise that you take off wet bathing suits or sweaty exercise clothing as soon as possible.

Some women find protecting their vulva with a moisturiser or Vaseline before exercise helpful.

Many women with vulval disease find it impacts on their sex life. This is a difficult problem and most find it embarrassing to speak about. We would encourage you to talk to your doctor, who should be able to recommend treatments to help you.

If sexual intercourse is painful, be sure to use plenty of lubrication.

Pain

A topical anaesthetic, such as lidocaine 5% ointment, can help. The ointment can numb the skin for a few hours.

If you have had a biopsy taken

The area may be sore for a day or two. Use a painkiller, as you would for a headache. You may bath and shower as normal.

If you have had a stitch, it will dissolve and does not normally have to be removed. However, if it is uncomfortable, it can be removed after a few days.

Is there anyone I can contact for further information?

There are many websites with information, for example:

www.bssvd.org

www.issvd.org/patient-education

www.macmillan.org.uk

Acknowledgement

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If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service

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