

# GENERAL VULVAR CARE

Adapted from E Stewart MD and Herman & Wallace

## General Hygiene

- The skin and moist surfaces of the female genitals are very delicate. It is important not to wash with harsh chemicals.
- Washing too often or rubbing too hard when drying can irritate this skin.
- If you have vulvar problems, washing with plain water is best (using soap/gels, and some cleaners can make problems worse).
- Gently separate the outer “lips” and bathe the inner skin with plain water, using your hands only. Then gently pat dry the outer skin.
- It is not necessary to wash the vulva every day and it should not be washed more than once per day. Do not use wipes, deodorants, douches, or other cosmetic and cleansing products.

## Physical Activity

- Avoid exercises that put direct pressure on the vulva such as bicycle riding or horseback riding
- Limit intense exercises that create a lot of friction in the vulvar area (try lower intensity exercises such as walking)
- Use a frozen gel pack wrapped in a towel to relieve symptoms after exercise
- Enroll in a yoga class to learn stretching and relaxation exercises
- Don't swim in highly chlorinated pools
- Avoid the use of hot tubs

## Clothing and Laundry

- Wear all-white cotton underwear; consider boy short type underwear
- Do not wear pantyhose (wear thigh high or knee high hose instead)
- Remove wet bathing suits and exercise clothing promptly. Avoid exercise in tight synthetic clothes. Avoid thongs completely.
- Wear loose-fitting pants or skirts. Take your underwear off when at home and go without underpants; or wear boxers
- Use dermatologically approved detergents such as Purex or Clear, Arm & Hammer (sensitive skin), All Free and Clear
- Double-rinse underwear and any other clothing that comes into contact with the vulva
- Do not use bleach or fabric softener on undergarments

## Sexual Intercourse

- Use a lubricant that is water soluble, (Astroglide or Slippery Stuff), but be aware that it contains propylene glycol (P.G.). A dab of cooking oil is fine if condoms are not used
- Ask your physician for a prescription for a topical anesthetic (Lidocaine gel 5%) (this may sting for the first 3-5 minutes after application)
- Apply ice or frozen gel pack wrapped in one layer of a hand towel for 5 minutes, to relieve burning after intercourse. Frozen corn or peas in a small sealed plastic bag mold comfortably to vulvar anatomy.

## Everyday living

- Use a sitting cushion for long periods of sitting
- If you must sit at work, try to intersperse periods of standing (e.g. arrange your office so that you can stand while you speak on the phone)
- Learn some relaxation techniques to do during the day (The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook by Davis, Eshelman and McKay or The Chronic Pain Control Workbook by Catalano and Hardin are recommended).

## Some tips

- Use soft, white, unscented toilet paper
- Use lukewarm or cool sitz baths to relieve burning or irritation
- Avoid getting shampoo on the vulvar area
- Do not use bubble bath, feminine hygiene products, powder, or any perfumed creams or soaps
- Wash the vulva with cool to lukewarm water only
- Rinse the vulva with water after urinations
- Prevent constipation by (a) adding fiber to your diet (if necessary, add psyllium product such as Metamucil) (b) drink at least 8 glasses water daily
- Use 100 percent cotton menstrual pads and tampons
- Avoid the daily use of pantliners. Change underwear as often as necessary to control wetness

## Treatment Web Addresses

- Vulval Pain Society ([www.vulvalpainsociety.org](http://www.vulvalpainsociety.org))
- National Vulvodynia Association ([www.nva.org](http://www.nva.org))
- Pelvic Pain Society ([www.pelvicpain.org](http://www.pelvicpain.org))