

Patient information

Care of vulval skin

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the care of vulval skin. It gives general advice if you have a diagnosed skin condition affecting the vulva, or you experience symptoms such as itching or soreness in the genital region.

What is vulval skin?

The vulva is the term used to describe the visible part of the female genitalia. The skin in this area is sensitive and can be easily irritated by everyday products including soaps and bubble baths.

How should I care for my vulval skin?

- wear loose fitting cotton or silk underwear
- close fitting clothes such as tights, cycling shorts, leggings or tight jeans should be avoided. Wear loose fitting trousers and skirts and replace tights with stockings. At home, you may find it more comfortable to wear long skirts without underwear
- sleep without underwear
- avoid soaps, shower gel, scrubs, bubble baths, deodorants, talcum powder, baby wipes or douches on the genital skin. Such products may make your skin sore and uncomfortable
- some over-the-counter creams including baby or nappy creams, herbal creams (e.g. tea tree oil, aloe vera) and 'thrush' treatments may contain irritants
- avoid wearing panty liners or sanitary towels on a regular basis
- avoid hair removal creams and waxing products which can irritate the vulval skin.

How should I wash my vulva?

- cleanse the vulval area only once a day using an emollient as a soap substitute
- although soap substitutes do not produce foam like normal soap, they are just as effective at cleansing the skin
- avoid using sponges or flannels to wash the vulva. Instead wash your vulva using aqueous cream or another emollient using just your hand
- gently pat the area dry with a soft towel.

What is an emollient?

An emollient is moisturiser which can be used as soap substitute for washing and to soothe and protect your skin. A range of emollients are available, ranging from greasy products to creams. These products can be bought in 500g tubs or in 100g tubes over the counter or on prescription from your GP. The emollient should be applied directly to your skin with your fingers and gently rubbed in.

When should I apply other treatments?

You may have been prescribed other treatments to use on the vulval skin.

Avoid applying your emollient at the same time as other treatments, as this may make them less effective.

Leave a break of at least 30 minutes between moisturising and applying other treatments.

This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about vulval care and is a consensus of views held by specialists in dermatology, gynaecology and genitourinary medicine.

Useful resources

Care of Vulval Skin: British Association of Dermatologists: <https://www.bad.org.uk>

The Management of Vulval Skin Disorders: Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/gynaecology/skin-conditions-of-the-vulva.pdf>