

PATIENT INFORMATION

General Care of the Vulval Skin

This leaflet is to help you understand more about the care of the vulval skin. It gives general advice for women who are experiencing symptoms such as itching, dryness or soreness in the genital region. Please contact a health professional if you need a further assessment or help in managing vulva/vaginal soreness.

What is the Vulva?

The vulva is the area surrounding the opening of the vagina. It includes the labia (the inner and outer vaginal lips) and the clitoris

What are the symptoms of a vulval skin condition?

A lot of women experience vulva changes, they can occur at any age. The most common symptoms are itching, pain, soreness or a change in the skin colour and texture. Sometimes they are a sign of a more general medical problem or skin disease. Conditions such as thyroid disease, diabetes, anaemia or a history of hay fever, asthma or eczema can be linked to some vulval skin conditions.

Often symptoms are made worse by moisture, heat or rubbing and by the use of scented products/deodorants. Sometimes symptoms can be caused by an allergic reaction and irritated by chemicals in washing powders and bath or sanitary products.

Vulval skin conditions can sometimes make intimate relationships difficult. Understandably, this can be very distressing.

What conditions might be causing my symptoms?

There are several skin conditions that may affect the vulva, including:

- Lichen sclerosis
- Lichen planus
- Vulval dermatitis (lichen simplex)
- Vulval atrophy
- VIN (Vulval intraepithelial neoplasia)
- Candida infection (thrush)
- Psoriasis

Some of these conditions might have specific treatments and medications. The following advice does not replace the medical treatment for your condition.

Washing Recommendations:

- Avoid soaps, bubble baths, shower gels, body scrubs, deodorants, wet wipes, baby wipes, and feminine wipes in the vulval area. Even 'simple' products and those advertised especially for the feminine area contain preservatives and chemicals that can irritate your skin.
- Washing with only water can dry the skin and aggravate symptoms.
- Avoid douching (spraying the vulval area with a shower head) and over washing the vulva and vagina. The vagina is self-cleaning and washing it disrupts the balance of bacteria that helps keep it free from infections.
- Use a soap substitute such as an aqueous cream/emollient wash
- Wash only once a day, over cleaning can aggravate symptoms
- Try and avoid washing your hair in the bath if you can
- In the shower, wash your body and hair if necessary, first. Rinse the vulva skin gently with fresh water and then wash using your soap substitute
- Dab dry with a soft towel, don't rub
- Apply emollient after washing
- Vaginal moisturisers can help and may prevent flare ups. There are lots available on the market. Try a test area first and try to select ones that are as natural and simple as possible.
- Barrier creams can be applied prior to passing urine to protect your skin and prevent the urine stinging.

General Advice:

- Wear loose fitting silk or cotton underwear in white or light colours. Wash new dark underwear a few times before wearing it, it will be less likely to cause an irritation
- Wear loose fitting trousers or skirts. At home you may find it more comfortable to wear long skirts without underwear
- Close fitting clothes such as tight, cycling shorts, leggings or tight jeans should be avoided
- An ice pack wrapped in a towel and applied to the skin can be soothing. Do not apply the ice pack directly to the skin
- Anti-histamines can sometimes help with symptoms of itching. This can be discussed further with your GP or pharmacist.
- Avoid fabric conditioners and biological washing powder. You might find you need to wash your underwear in a separate wash.

- Avoid baby creams or herbal creams such as tea tree oil and aloe vera as they may include possible irritants
- Where possible avoid wearing pantyliners or sanitary pads and certainly not perfumed ones.
- Avoid coloured toilet paper
- Avoid shaving or waxing your pubic hair, trimming is better
- Avoid spermicidal lubricated condoms
- Avoid hot tubs
- Wipe from front to back after a bowel movement and after passing urine
- Use a suitable lubricant during intercourse but avoid anything that is scented

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

Working with you, for you

25752/V1/Physiotherapy /TSDFT/03.26/Review Date 03.28