

# Vulvovaginal Skin Care

The following is a list of recommendations for maintaining vulvar and vaginal health & preventing complications.

## **Clothing and Laundry**

1. Wear only white, cotton, brief underwear. Limit use of thong underwear and synthetic fibers/dyes
2. Sleep without underwear.
3. Avoid tight fitting pants and pantyhose.
4. Remove wet bathing suits and exercise clothing as soon as possible.
5. Use natural detergents and double rinse clothing, especially underwear (ie: Seventh Generation laundry detergent - Target).
6. Avoid fabric softener and dryer sheets (balled up foil works just as well to prevent static).

## **Hygiene**

1. Avoid soap to the mucosal tissue of the vulva and vagina (skin that looks like the inside of your mouth). Use sensitive, natural or organic bar soaps to hair bearing tissue (ie: Cetaphil, Shea Moisture baby bar soap, etc).
2. Avoid harsh scrubbing to vulva or vagina. Rather, use warm water and your hand to gently rinse this area. You can even use a squirt bottle filled with warm water.
3. Cleanse the vulva with warm water after urination if this is a typical cause of vulvar discomfort.
4. Blot dry when using the restroom.
5. Use only soft, white, unscented toilet paper preferably free from chlorine and bleach (Seventh Generation, Green Forest).
6. Avoid baths with scalding hot water and harsh products such as bubble baths, etc.
7. Use natural (Seventh Generation) or cloth (Glad Rags) pads/tampons for menses and try to avoid daily use of pads outside of menses. Address urinary leakage that requires wearing daily pads with your health care provider.
8. Do not self treat with over the counter vaginal creams, douches, wipes, etc without first speaking to your health care provider. Always notify your provider of any itching, burning, bleeding, pain, etc.

## **Diet/Supplements**

1. Avoid constipation by eating a high fiber diet and/or adding products such as Miralax and drinking plenty of water each day.
2. Take a probiotic supplement daily to improve GI function and prevent internal yeast growth. Use only freeze dried or refrigerated probiotics such as Align.
3. Generally follow a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins with minimal simple carbohydrates. Limit sugar, caffeine and alcohol intake. Maintain a healthy body weight.

## **Sexual Intercourse**

1. If needed, use a glycerin free, water soluble lubricant such as Slippery Stuff or more natural products such as Sliquid, Wet or Pur. Avoid Astroglide and KY products that contain glycerin.
2. Do not use flavored/scented products, foods, chemical-based arousal oils in the genital region.
3. Do not use contraceptive creams or spermicides and avoid condoms with spermicide.
4. If you are allergic to latex and you need to use condoms, try polyurethane condoms. Avoid lamb's skin condoms. Another option is the nitrile female condom, FC2.
5. Allow for at least 10-15 minutes of foreplay in preparation for intercourse and use coconut oil or vegetable based cooking oil (Spectrum) for vulvovaginal massage.
6. Ask your provider for a prescription for a topical anesthetic (ie: lidocaine 5% ointment) that can reduce pain before, during or after intercourse.
7. Stop intercourse if you experience pain. If you are unable to tolerate intercourse, continue some form of arousal 3 times weekly including erotic reading, massage or oral sex.
8. Use an ice pack and/or a frozen condom filled with water to relieve discomfort following sex.

### **Physical Activity**

1. Avoid exercises that put direct pressure on the vulva such as bicycle riding and horseback riding, or purchase modified seats that put less pressure on the vulva.
2. Limit exercise that causes friction and pain to the vulva and instead consider lower intensity exercise such as walking.
3. Avoid hot tubs.
4. Enroll in classes such as Yoga or Pilates that teach strengthening of the core and stretching/relaxation.
5. Ask your provider if you are a candidate for pelvic floor physical therapy.
6. If sitting for long periods of time, fold a towel in half long way, and roll up each end to provide a cushion for each "sitting bone". This will relieve pressure on the vulva. You can also purchase a special pillow to alleviate pressure on the genitals: search "bladder and prostate friendly pillow" on Amazon.com. It has a blue cover.

### **Additional Notes**

- Many over the counter products contain harsh ingredients such as glycerin, preservatives and alcohol which are known to dry tissue and cause irritation in sensitive people (ie: Monistat, Vagisil, Astroglide, KY products). Chemical based soaps and detergents can indirectly do the same when used on clothing, especially underwear. Dyes and synthetic fabrics can also irritate vulvar tissue.
- The vagina is self cleansing. It is a common misconception that you must douche to keep the vagina healthy. Actually, douching washes out the healthy bacteria within the vagina and leaves it susceptible to infection.
- While most women who report recurrent vaginal infections feel that they are caused by yeast, bacterial infections are actually more common than yeast infections and they are treated in a completely different manner.
- Slippery Stuff can be purchased through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Polyurethane condoms can also be purchased from this websites.
- Coconut oil can be purchased at most health food stores (Whole Foods, Vitamin Shoppe) as well as most grocery stores. Look for "cold pressed organic coconut oil". This is solid at room temperature but melts very quickly in the hand. Do not use this product if you have an allergy to coconut. An alternative is Spectrum oil.
- Regular arousal brings much needed blood flow with oxygen and nutrients to the vulvovaginal tissue. This helps to promote the healing process and keeps the tissue lubricated and elastic. "Use it or lose it!" Also, orgasm is more potent than many narcotic pain medications!

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## NOTES:

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