

Preventing vulval pain and irritation

Information and advice for patients

Gynaecology

The vulva is the external genitalia in the female. The skin of the vulva can be quite sensitive. Because it is moist and frequently subject to friction while sitting and moving, this area can be easily injured. There are various things that you can do to prevent irritation and allow the vulva to heal.

Keeping clean

- Clean the vulva only once a day, avoiding scrubbing with flannels and brushes.
- Clean the vulva with water only, preferably using showers not baths.
- Avoid soaps, bubble baths, deodorants, and vaginal wipes from coming into contact with the vulva.
- Avoid antiseptics in the bath and rinse the bath carefully after cleaning it.
- When washing your hair avoid allowing the shampoo from coming into contact with the vulva. Try washing your hair in the sink.

Keeping dry

- Skin that is moist becomes soft and easily injured; therefore, keeping this area dry can promote healing.
- Don't sit or remain in a wet bathing suit.

Underwear

- Wear loose-fitting cotton underwear.
- Try washing underwear with baking soda soap only or use a sensitive skin washing powder; avoid biological and fragranced washing powders.
- After washing underwear, put it through at least one whole cycle with water only. Rinsing clothes thoroughly is more important than which detergent is used.
- Wash new underwear before wearing it.
- Do not use fabric softeners or drying sheets.

Using the toilet

- If passing urine makes your symptoms worse, then wash the urine away from the vulva using a jug of warm water whilst on the toilet.
- Only use white or unbleached toilet tissue.

Tampons and menstrual pads

Many women with vulval pain experience an increase in irritation and pain every month when they use paper pads or tampons. This monthly increase in pain can often be reduced by using 100% washable and reusable cotton menstrual pads. Pure cotton tampons are also available.

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Other things to avoid

- Avoid contraceptive devices that may irritate the skin.
- Avoid creams that have not been prescribed.

Further information

The Vulval Pain Society (VPS)

www.vulvalpainsociety.org

Worldwide Lichen Sclerosus Support

www.lichensclerosus.org

National Vulvodynia Association

www.nva.org

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns you can contact:

Professor Leusley, Consultant Gynaecologist

0121 507 5337

Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- British Medical Journal, Nunns D, Murphy R, 'Assessment and management of vulval pain', 2012
- Patient.co.uk Professional Reference, 'Vulval abnormalities and their management', January 2014
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 'Vulval skin disorders, Management', February 2011

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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