



ANZ Vulvovaginal Society

## **Vulval Skin Care**

### **Washing**

- You don't have a hygiene problem. Using soap, particularly if this is done frequently, will in fact make your skin more sensitive. Avoid soap, abrasive washers and wet wipes. A soap substitute such as QV wash, or simply soaking in the bath is the best way to clean vulval skin.
- When having a bath, make sure it is not too hot. Avoid bubble bath, perfumed oils, medicated bath oils and antiseptics. A bath oil formulated for sensitive skin, or just a handful of salt is the best bath additive.
- Saline, made by adding two teaspoons of salt to a litre of water, is very useful if your skin is inflamed. Apply on a wad of cotton wool or soak in a bowl.
- Pat dry gently, and avoid scratching with a towel. You may find it helpful to dry your vulval skin with your hairdryer set on "cool".

### **Avoiding irritating substances**

- It is very important only to apply what your doctor recommends. Even if you are desperate, don't try things from the bathroom cupboard.
- Avoid perfumed products, feminine sprays and antiseptics. Old medications should never be used. Methylated spirits, aloe vera and ti-tree oil are popular remedies but they can be very irritating. Use tampons rather than pads if possible for menstruation: the plastic backing in pads is a real problem. Don't use pantliners on a daily basis between your periods: even "breathable" liners may increase irritation. If you have a heavy discharge, change your underwear at lunchtime and put the used panty in a snap-lock plastic bag.
- Use hypoallergenic toilet paper (Sorbent).
- Many women have difficulty cleaning after a bowel motion and therefore wipe far too much. A simple solution is to put a thick layer of petroleum jelly also known as vaseline over your anal skin before you have a motion. This protects the skin, and makes cleaning much easier.

- If you go swimming in a chlorinated pool, take off your costume and shower right away.
- Avoid nylon underwear, tight pants, G-strings and control panties.

### **Things you could be allergic to**

- Toilet paper
- Lubricants
- Any medication, either prescribed or over-the-counter
- Perfumed products
- Antifungal creams and pessaries
- Antiseptics
- Nail polish
- Latex condoms
- Semen

If you suspect any of these things make you worse, avoid contact with them. If you think you have a problem with semen, discuss this with your doctor.

### **Sexual function**

- Most patients with a vulval problem have found that it has interfered with their sex life in some way. Sexual arousal may be less easy, leading to anxiety, dryness and sometimes painful vaginal spasm. It is normal for women to take longer to become aroused than men, and it is important not to attempt vaginal intercourse until aroused.
- Don't attempt penetration if it is causing pain. Wait until your problem has settled completely. It is possible to have a sex life without penetration and you need to discuss this with your partner.
- Lubricants can often help, but avoid gels. These usually sting and may contain antiseptics. Vaseline or ordinary cooking oil is best (put a towel down first!).

**Remember that your problem is one that needs ongoing care. Forgetting about treatment may lead to relapse, so it is important to make your treatment part of your daily routine.**

The Australia and New Zealand Vulvovaginal Society  
[www.anzvs.org](http://www.anzvs.org)