# Vulval skin care advice

Information for patients

## Vulval skin care

This leaflet aims to support you in taking good care of your vulval skin. If you have been having symptoms of discomfort at the vulval skin, please check in with your doctor. The general advice on care and washing applies to everyone long term, yet if you have a prescription for a vulval skin condition please use this as instructed. Also ensure you have the correct information for management of any skin conditions you may have been diagnosed with.

## What is the vulva?

The vulva is the area of the female genitalia that you can see. The vulva is therefore, the area between your legs which surrounds the vaginal opening, it includes the vaginal labia (lips), and the clitoris. This skin tissue is very delicate and requires different advice for washing and hygiene than the skin on the rest of your body.

## General advice

- Wear loose fitting underwear made from natural fibres such as silk or cotton (avoid synthetic fabrics)
- Wear loose fitting clothing and avoid tight clothing that may irritate the area such as tights and jeans
- Sleep without wearing underwear
- Take a shower rather than a bath.

Things to avoid:

- Avoid fabric conditioners, and biological washing powders when you wash your clothes as this can irritate the vulval skin
- Avoid using soaps, bubble bath, shower gel, cleansing wipes, perfumes, deodorants and antiseptics on the vulval area
- Avoid coloured toilet paper
- Avoid wearing sanitary pads, or incontinence pads, or panty liners for long periods
- Avoid spermicidal-lubricated condoms
- Avoid vaginal douches
- Avoid swimming in chlorinated pool – unless barrier cream is applied first.

## Vulval skin washing advice

This section will outline the best way to wash and care for the vulval skin. This guidance is best followed by everyone:

- Wash the vulva using an emollient (not soap)
- Wash using your hands (not a flannels, sponges or towel which can be rough)
- Wash in the shower rather than the bath
- Wash the vulvae once per day (try to avoid over washing).

## Emollient moisturisers

Emollients are moisturisers. Emollients can be used to wash the vulva, and also as a moisturiser during the day if needed. Leave 15-20 minutes between using an emollient to wash your vulva before applying any other skin treatments you have been prescribed. You can buy emollients over the counter or ask your local pharmacist for advice. Please note emollients should not be used as a lubricant for intercourse, and oil-based emollients can lead to condoms being ineffective.

## Vulval skin conditions

Some common vulval skin conditions include:

- Lichen Sclerosus
- Lichen Simplex Chronicus
- Lichen Planus
- Candida Infection (thrush)
- Psoriasis
- Vulval Dermatitis (eczema)
- Vulvodynia
- Vulval Intraepithelial Neoplasia (VIN).

If you have been diagnosed with any of the above conditions, please follow the medical guidance you have been provided, as well as the above guidance in this leaflet.

### References

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