

Care of Vulval Skin



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Vulval soreness, pain, dryness and irritation are very common conditions. Vulval skin is very sensitive and can be easily irritated by every day products including soap, bubble bath, shower gel, talcum powder, wet wipes, perfumes, deodorants, antiseptics, fragranced washing powders and fabric conditioners.

It can be embarrassing and uncomfortable when the vulval skin becomes sore, irritated or dry, but there are some things that you can do to improve matters.

- Avoid all irritant products to the vulval area as listed above.
- Do not wash too often (once a day is usually enough) as this may aggravate dryness and cause irritation. Avoid vaginal douching and hair removal.
- Use a **soap substitute** for washing; washing only with water can aggravate dryness. Aqueous cream BPC can be used as a soap substitute, it is inexpensive and available at the local chemist. Alternatively use an emollient as a soap substitute (see more information later). Wash your vulval skin gently either using your hands or a soft flannel or cloth. Alternatively apply the soap substitute before entering the bath or shower. Do not use wet wipes
- Dry skin thoroughly after a bath or shower - even use a cool hairdryer.
- After washing apply an **emollient** to moisturise and soothe the vulval skin. Emollients can be applied frequently throughout the day as required to soothe the skin and also to act as a protective barrier prior to passing water or

opening your bowels. Although aqueous cream is often prescribed, there are better emollients available. Some people may have a reaction to aqueous cream used as an emollient, and it has a high water content, making it less effective than other products as a leave-on emollient

- Emollients do not cause serious side effects. Occasionally they may irritate or sting if your skin is sensitive then try an alternative product. If you develop a rash or your skin condition worsens after using an emollient, stop using it and consult your doctor as you may be allergic to one of the ingredients but this is unusual.
- If you are using other treatments to the skin such as a steroid cream do not use this at the same time as the emollient as it may dilute their effect. Leave an interval of 15-30 minutes between moisturising and applying other treatments
- Avoid tight fitting clothes such as jeans or leggings and avoid tights - stockings are better. Always wear loose cotton underwear.
- Scratching should be avoided at all costs as it can damage the skin further. If this is a problem at night wear light cotton gloves and keep nails short. If irritation is unbearable, pinching is preferable to scratching, as it is less likely to break the skin surface.

Types of Emollients

There is not a single emollient product which suits everyone, sometimes you may need to try a range of products to find one which suits you. Emollients come in different forms which include **lotions, creams, ointments, wash gels and bath additives.**

Emollient creams are less greasy than emollient ointments. They are easy to spread, absorb easily into the skin and are good for use during the daytime.

Below is a list of products in alphabetical order available from the local chemist

Cetraben

Dermol

Diprobase

Doublebase

Epaderm

Emulsifying Ointment

Hydromol

Zeroderm Ointment

Vaginal Dryness

Vaginal dryness is more common in older women especially around the time of the menopause but may also occur in younger women at certain times in your life. This may affect your interpersonal relationship and sexual function. There are a number of products which may be helpful

Vaginal moisturisers are absorbed into the vaginal skin and can be used regularly to relieve dryness. Available products include **Replens, Sylk and Yes** moisturisers

Personal lubricants are used to relieve dryness in association with sex. They may be water based or silicone based. Available products include **Astroglide, KY jelly, Pjur, Yes** lubricant

References and Further Information

NHS Choices on Emollients

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Emollients/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

[accessed Sept 2017]

British Association of Dermatologists

www.bad.org.uk

[accessed Sept 2017]

British Society for the Study of Vulval Disease

<https://bssvd.org/guidelines-and-patient-information/>

[accessed Sept 2017]

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution

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