

VAGINAL HYGIENE



Your vagina is a self cleaning system. We often think of it as similar to your nasal passageway. Using products such as soap, powder, douche or lotion can introduce irritants into the area causing irritation and infection.

Vaginal discharge, leukorrhea, is normal. All women have a varying amount of discharge that may change throughout their hormone cycle. Discharge that is related to infection is usually accompanied by a vaginal odor or irritation and/or itching. If you develop these symptoms see your healthcare provider.

Here are some recommendations to promote good vulvovaginal health.

- **Avoid using products on your vulva or in your vagina** such as scented soaps, bubble bath, detergents, lotions, powders, baby wipes and douche.
- **Rinse your genital area with warm water only.** There is no need to use soaps to clean the area, since the vagina cleans itself.
- **Avoid shaving or waxing the vulva.** This can cause irritation.
- **Avoid scrubbing the vulva.** This can cause healthy skin to break down.
- **Wear cotton underwear.** Non-cotton underwear traps moisture.
- **Sleep with your underwear off at night.** This allows the area to breathe.
- **Avoid wearing wet or tight fitting clothing.** Change your workout clothes and/or swimsuit as soon as you are done with activity. Keep the area dry.
- **After urinating be sure to wipe front to back.** Wiping back to front can bring bacteria from your rectum into the vulva and vagina.
- **Avoid wearing panty liners.** They create a “wick” which sucks out moisture that is needed for comfort and lubrication. If you have excessive discharge, change your underwear more often.
- **Urinate immediately after intercourse and whenever you feel the urge.** This will help reduce the amount of bacteria in the bladder and prevent urinary tract infection (UTI).
- **When choosing a lubricant or other products for sexual activity,** avoid colors, warming gels, flavors, bactericides, and spermicides in your lubricants or moisturizers. They can irritate the already sensitive vaginal mucosa.

For more information about female sexual function in the context of cancer, visit www.womanlab.org, and connect:

 @WomanLab_

 WeAreWomanLab

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Important professional organizations recommend that doctors talk to women with cancer about sexual function:

National Comprehensive Cancer Network (www.nccn.org)

National Cancer Institute (www.cancer.gov)

The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
(www.acog.org)

Society of Gynecologic Oncology (www.sgo.org)

Scientific Network for Female Sexual Health and Cancer
(www.cancersexnetwork.org)