

VULVAR AND VAGINAL HYGIENE



The shiny or mucosal surfaces of your vulva and your vagina are a self-cleaning system. Think of it as similar to the inside of your nose. Using products like soap, powder, douche, wipes or lotion can introduce irritants that break down your body's natural cleaning and protective barriers. These products can sting or burn or cause problems without you realizing it.

Clear and whitish vaginal discharge is normal. All people with a vagina have some discharge that may change with the menstrual cycle and with other hormone changes like pregnancy or menopause. Discharge due to infection or irritants usually comes with a vaginal odor, irritation, itching and a persistent yellow or green color. If you have these symptoms see your healthcare professional.

Here are some recommendations to keep your vulva and vagina healthy.

- **Avoid using products on your vulva or in your vagina** like scented soaps, bubble bath, detergents, lotions, powders, baby wipes and douche. If you take baths, use vinegar and water to clean your tub and be careful to fully rinse any other cleaning products out before you go in.
- **If you feel you need to clean your genital area, rinse with warm water using a gentle spray bottle or mix warm water with white table vinegar.** Do NOT squirt anything with high pressure into your vagina. This could force air into a blood vessel and cause a life-threatening condition called air embolism.
- **Avoid shaving or waxing the vulva, especially in the midline.** The hair is there to protect you from irritants and infections.
- **Avoid scrubbing the vulva.** Scrubbing can cause healthy skin to break down.
- **Wear cotton underwear.** Non-cotton underwear traps moisture.
- **Sleep with your underwear off at night** to let the area get some air and avoid trapping moisture.
- **Avoid wearing wet or tight fitting clothing.** Change your workout clothes and swimsuit as soon as you are done with activity. Gently pat dry. Don't rub. Don't blow with a hair dryer.
- **After urinating, wipe once. Wipe front to back.** Wiping back to front can bring bacteria from your bowel movement and anus into the vulva and vagina.
- **Avoid wearing panty liners and pads.** They suck out your normal moisture. It's better and less costly to change your underwear more often than to always wear a pad.
- **Urinate immediately after intercourse and whenever you feel the urge.** This will help prevent urinary tract infection (UTI).
- **When choosing a lubricant or moisturizer or other products for your vagina or vulva,** avoid colors, warming gels, flavors, bactericides, and spermicides. These products can be very irritating.

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



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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)