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## GENITAL SKIN CARE

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Dermatitis, candida (thrush) or tinea infections can cause the genital skin to itch. Herpes and syphilis can also produce itch and soreness. It is important to see your doctor to get a diagnosis for your symptoms.

### In general try to:

1. **Avoid irritants:** the more ingredients that a product contains, the more likely it will cause irritation. Anything that lathers will remove healthy oils from the skin

#### **Potential irritants include:**

1. Soaps, shower gels and bubble baths, “feminine” products
2. Cleansing wipes (eg baby wipes)
3. Daily use of panty liners (limit use of pads and panty liners to periods)
4. Perfumed products,
5. Tea tree oil and other disinfectants
6. Medicated topical treatments (unless prescribed)
7. Black underwear (rare cause)
8. Fabric softeners
9. Douches

#### **Recommended washing of the genital skin:**

As the genital skin and skin near the anus is very sensitive we recommend that you limit washing to once a day. Wash with water or use a pH adjusted wash for sensitive skin (multiple brands such as Cetaphil®, QV®, Dermaveen®, Aveeno®, Hamilton’s®) or use an unperfumed moisturiser (such as sorbolene or aqueous cream).

2. **Protect the skin and keep it dry:** avoid prolonged wetness and moisturise skin if it is dry. Prolonged wetness (water, sweat or urine) weakens the skin and increases the risk of producing irritation, dermatitis and infection.

#### **General recommendations include:**

1. Remove wet swim wear or gym clothes promptly
2. Carry spare underwear to change into if your underwear becomes damp.
3. Fine merino (at hiking stores) or silk underwear wick away moisture quicker than even cotton
4. Otherwise cotton underwear (avoid black if there is a suspicion of dye allergy)
5. Avoid synthetic underwear
6. If you experience urine or faecal incontinence or diarrhoea, use a barrier ointment to protect the skin and change continence pads regularly. Consider seeing a continence physiotherapist.
7. Consider protective ointments before exercise
8. Ointments don’t contain preservatives, unlike creams, and are therefore less likely to be irritating. They also protect better against wetness than creams.
9. Use regular moisturisers such as Vaseline®, Dermeze®, and zinc paste.

3. **Decrease Friction or Rubbing:** Try NOT to SCRATCH or RUB– keep cold water in the fridge to use as a cold compress

Skin damaged by friction and rubbing is more easily infected by common skin bacteria and yeasts that otherwise would not cause a problem. Scratching can also lead to thickening of the skin and nerve fibres, which increases itching (itch-scratch cycle, especially at night and if you have a tendency to hay-fever and asthma).

### To help decrease itching you can:

- Avoid rubbing the genital skin with a washcloth or paper – use water if possible

- Pat dry rather than rubbing with a towel ( try a hairdryer on a cool setting)
- Avoid shaving and waxing the genital area
- Avoid tight clothing
- Pads and liners can chafe as well as cause allergies
- If you are scratching at night, cut your nails and wear loose underwear to bed. If you wake scratching, get out of bed and cool the skin.
- Keep cool – avoid electric blankets and hot showers/baths
- Use distraction or relaxation techniques when you get the urge to scratch
- You may find anti-histamines helpful. Try a once a day non-sedating antihistamine initially, but discuss a night time sedating one with your doctor.

**Some general advice regarding sexual activity:**

- Water based lubricants are recommended with condoms but can dry to an irritating powder. Rinse off with water after use and moisturize as above. Experiment with various types of lubricants, eg Sylk, Pjur, KY  
If condoms are not needed, vegetable oils will be less irritating and may lubricate for longer. These include: Almond, Olive, Coconut and Crisco veg oil.  
It is important to be aware that oils can weaken condoms; - If a condom breaks – emergency contraception is effective if used within 72-96 hours. Consider the risk of an STI.
- Keep intercourse brief  
If using condoms and the various water based lubricants irritate, but dryness is a problem, discuss this with your partner. If you are relaxed and well aroused the need for a lubricant may be less.  
If you still need a lubricant, consider the oils above. Shorten intercourse to less than 3-5 minutes (which is a common length of time reported for intercourse).

**Genital First Aid for moist inflamed and split skin:**

- A fistful of salt in a bath (or 1 level teaspoon salt per litre of cool water as a soak on a cloth) pat dry Apply for 5-10 minutes for 3-5 days or
- 1/8000 potassium permanganate solution on cotton balls or fine cloth

**If you are experiencing pain on urinating or with bowel actions:**

Urine or faeces on broken skin can hurt. Drink plenty of water to keep urine dilute and avoid constipation. Consider Vaseline or a local anaesthetic gel or ointment 10 minutes before toileting. Hold away the genital skin and for women, adjust your body position (e.g. lean forward) when urinating so as to avoid urine dripping backwards onto inflamed skin. For extensive ulcers, try urinating in a bath of water.

**DISCLAIMER:**

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Genital Skin Care. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.