

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

VULVAL SKINCARE

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS LEAFLET?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the care of vulval skin. It gives general advice on vulval skincare for both women and girls. It does not address specific skin conditions affecting the vulva, although it can help in relieving symptoms such as itching, dryness or soreness in the genital region without any specific diagnosis.

For more information on skin conditions that may affect the vulva in women and children, see the section **“Where can I get more information?”** at the bottom of this leaflet.

WHAT IS VULVAL SKIN?

The “vulva” is the term used to describe the visible part of the female genitalia, around the vagina area, which includes the inner and outer “lips” (labia) and clitoris.

HOW SHOULD I CARE FOR MY VULVAL SKIN?

- The skin of the vulva is sensitive and can be easily irritated by everyday products including panty liners, soap, bubble baths, shower gels, talcum powder, cleansing wipes and feminine hygiene wipes, perfumes, deodorants, antiseptics, fragranced washing powders and fabric conditioners.
- Avoid using any of the irritant products listed above on the vulva.
- Do not wash the vulva too often (once a day is usually enough) as washing too often may aggravate dryness and cause irritation.

- Apply an unscented **emollient** (moisturising) ointment, cream or lotion regularly to soothe, protect and act as a barrier.
- If shampoos and shower gels irritate the vulva during showering you can apply your **emollient** before having a bath or shower to prevent the skin from coming into contact with these products.
- You may find it more comfortable to wear loose fitting 100% cotton underwear and avoid tight fitting clothing such as tights, jeans or leggings.
- Sleep without underwear.

HOW SHOULD I WASH MY VULVA?

Wash your vulva gently, using your hands. Avoid using a flannel or cloth as this can scratch the skin. Pat the area dry with a soft towel. It is preferable to always use an emollient cream or ointment as a substitute for soap. Do not use cleansing wet wipes as these may irritate vulval skin.

HOW SHOULD I APPLY AN EMOLLIENT?

An **emollient** will moisturise and soothe the vulval skin if it is sore, dry or itchy. A wide variety of **emollients** is available, ranging from greasy ointments to creams. In general, ointments are better than lotions and creams to use on vulval skin as they offer more protection against moisture loss, but it is really down to your personal preference. Avoid perfumed products and those with long ingredient lists.

All **emollients** can be bought over the counter, or your GP can prescribe them.

If using an ointment preparation, take it out of the pot using a clean wooden spatula or spoon to avoid contaminating it with your fingers.

The emollient should be applied directly to the vulval skin with your fingers and gently rubbed in. Ensure your fingernails are not rough or chipped as this may scratch the vulval skin which is very delicate. **Emollients** should be applied as often as you need and there is no restriction on when or how much to use. They can also be used as a protective barrier prior to passing water (urine) or opening your bowels.

WHEN SHOULD I APPLY OTHER TREATMENTS?

Do not apply emollients at the same time as other treatments such as steroid creams or other treatments prescribed by your doctor. This may reduce their effect and risk spreading the treatment to other areas. Leave an interval of at least 15-30 minutes between moisturising and applying other treatments.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF EMOLLIENTS?

Emollients are unlikely to cause side effects unless you are allergic to one of the ingredients. Occasionally they may irritate or sting if the skin is sensitive. In this case, it is worth consulting your doctor and/or trying an alternative product.

It is **important** to note that oil-based emollients may cause latex condoms and diaphragms to be damaged or degraded, leading to possible breaks and splits. A cream form of emollient may, therefore, be preferable. You do not need to refrain from sexual intercourse if using an **emollient**.

CAUTION:

This leaflet mentions 'emollients' (moisturisers). Emollients, creams, lotions, and ointments contain oils. When emollient products get in contact with dressings, clothing, bed linen or hair, there is a danger that they could catch fire more easily. There is still a risk if the emollient products have dried. People using skincare or haircare products should be very careful near naked flames or lit cigarettes. Wash clothing daily and bedlinen frequently, if they are in contact with emollients. This may not remove the risk completely, even at high temperatures. Caution is still needed. More information may be obtained at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safe-use-of-emollient-skin-creams-to-treat-dry-skin-conditions>.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Web links to leaflets on vulval skin conditions:

<https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/vulvodynia-and-vestibulodynia/>

<https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/vulvitis-in-childhood/>

<https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/lichen-sclerosus-in-females/>

<https://www.bad.org.uk/pils/lichen-sclerosus-in-female-children/>



This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: individual patient circumstances may differ, which might alter both the advice and course of therapy given to you by your doctor.

This leaflet has been assessed for readability by the British Association of Dermatologists' Patient Information Lay Review Panel

**BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF
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