

GENITAL HYGIENE



Women

Wash the vulval area once a day. Washing the external area only with warm water is adequate but if your skin is dry, you may use a small amount of a soap substitute (see below). You should use your hand and avoid using flannels or sponges or over cleaning as this will irritate the skin. Use a soft towel to gently dab the area dry.

Men

Wash the penis everyday, making sure you slide the foreskin back towards your body so the head of the penis is exposed. Wash with warm water and do not use soap as this may irritate the area, especially if there is inflammation, and is not required to clean adequately. A soap substitute may be used (see below). After washing, make sure the head of the penis is completely dry before replacing the foreskin. If you are prone to developing symptoms after sex, it may help to wash the penis shortly after having sex.

Soap Substitutes/Emollients

Non-perfumed moisturising/ emollient creams and ointments of which there are many brands including Aqueous cream, Dermol and Hydromol can be used as soap substitutes and as moisturisers to ease and prevent dryness of the skin. These can be bought over the counter or given on prescription from your GP. It is important to find the moisturiser that suits you best. If you find that it is causing irritation, redness or burning, discontinue use and try a different one. If your skin is irritated, they can be kept in the fridge and dabbed on to cool and soothe the skin as often as you like. Even when you do not have symptoms, using a moisturiser will protect the skin and can prevent flare-ups.

Remember, oil based products can cause condoms to break!

Salt Water Bathing

If recommended, you can wash with water that has some salt added to it. Run a shallow bath or sink of warm water and add a handful of table salt and mix. Wash your skin as advised above.

What to avoid

Avoid anything that may irritate the area. For example, baby wipes, shower gels, bubble baths, deodorants, hygiene sprays or wipes etc. Some over-the-counter creams including baby or nappy creams, herbal creams (e.g. tea tree oil, aloe vera) and 'thrush' treatments may include irritants. If you find that lubricants or latex condoms are irritant look for a lubricant without alcohol such as Sylk and try latex-free condoms.

Wear light colours of underwear. Dark textile dyes (black, navy) may cause an allergy; if you wash new dark underwear a few times before wearing it, it will be less likely to cause a problem.

Avoid fabric conditioners and biological washing powders. You may want to wash your underwear separately in a non-biological washing powder/gel.

Avoid antiseptic (as a cream or added to bath water).

Avoid coloured toilet paper.

Avoid wearing panty liners or sanitary towels on a regular basis. Use unscented unbleached tampons and sanitary towels/pads and panty liners such as natracare products (www.natracare.co.uk)

Avoid wearing nail varnish on finger nails if you tend to scratch your skin.

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