

## Guidelines for feminine genital care

### Laundry

- Wash underwear by hand using a mild, enzyme free soap such as *Tide Free* or *Woolite Gentle Cycle*.
- Do not use fabric softener or dryer sheets on any underwear. These products are perfumed and are frequently irritating.

### Clothing:

- Wear white, all cotton underpants, not nylon with a cotton crotch. *Jockey for Her* and *Hanes Her Way* are two brands to try.
- Avoid tight clothing and clothing made of synthetics. Change underwear after exercising as soon as possible. Remove wet bathing suits quickly.
- Larger women may have problems with chronic dampness. Keeping dry is important. Choose cotton fabrics, avoid tight clothing and synthetic fabrics, and change underwear frequently when you are sweating.

### Bathing and hygiene

- Avoid bath soaps, bubble baths, lotions, gels, etc. which contain perfumes. These are irritating. NOTE: Many baby products and feminine hygiene products are misleadingly labeled marked “gentle” or “mild”; do not use. *Dove*, *Neutrogena*, and *Pears* are soaps we suggest.
- Do not scrub the vulvar skin with a washcloth. Washing it with your hand is enough for a good cleaning.
- Do not shave the vulvar area. Shaving causes irritation and increases your risk of infection. It also increases your risk of sexually transmitted diseases.
- Use white unscented toilet paper

### Menstrual care

- Avoid prolonged use of a single tampon. Wearing tampons too long or when the flow of blood is light may result in vaginal infection, increased discharge, or odor. Tampons work best when the flow is heavy enough to soak one tampon in 4 hours or less.

### About sex:

- Contraceptive jellies, creams, or sponges may cause itching and burning. Sometimes a different brand may help. Ask your provider or pharmacist for help.
- Lubricant during intercourse may help prevent irritation. Use any pure vegetable oil, such as canola, since they contain no dyes or perfumes and will last throughout intercourse. Water-based products like K-Y jelly are also helpful.

### For temporary minor irritation:

- Try soaking in a warm bathtub (not hot, 4-5 inches water), with 4-5 tablespoons of baking soda to relieve vulvar itching and burning. Soak 2-3 times a day for 5-10 minutes as needed.
- Small amounts of A and D ointment or 40% zinc oxide (diaper rash ointment) may be applied to protect the skin. It may help decrease skin irritation during your period or when burning or itching.
- **If your symptoms persist more than 1-2 days, or are more than mild, or you have increased or changed discharge, see your healthcare provider.**