

Skin care in the genital area

An essential part of managing genital skin conditions in both men and women is careful maintenance of the skin and avoidance of potential irritants.

Genital skin problems include a wide variety of lesions and skin rashes. They are very common and can be very itchy or painful, distressing or embarrassing. The genitals are covered by a thinner type of skin and may be more sensitive to irritants than other parts of the body.



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Care of the genital skin

General advice

- Avoid contact with perfumed soaps, bubble baths, bath bombs and foaming shower gels
- Use emollient soap substitutes for washing; they do not need to lather to clean the skin
- Gently wash the area and pat dry with a soft towel
- Wear loose-fitting clothing and underwear made from natural fibres e.g. cotton
- Avoid nylon tights and tight fitting garments which may irritate the area
- Avoid use of chemical irritants found in some everyday products
 - Avoid biological or fragranced washing powder and fabric conditioner (for underwear), feminine hygiene sprays, perfumes or wipes and bleached or coloured sanitary products e.g. toilet paper and sanitary towels
 - These chemicals can cause sensitivity, dryness, redness and cracking of the genital skin
- Avoid use of spermicidally lubricated condoms. Be aware that using oil-based emollients in this area may weaken latex condoms and diaphragms
- Use emollients to protect the skin

Use of emollients and soap substitutes

Emollients are widely recognised as having a key role in protecting the skin and restoring skin barrier function.

Avoiding soap and detergents, and using soap substitutes can be soothing and protective to the skin.

The combined use of emollients and soap substitutes helps maintain symptom relief.

Please note that dried emollient residue collecting on dressings, clothing and bedlinen makes these materials burn more easily, so it's important to keep them away from lit cigarettes and other sources of ignition and wash them regularly.

Always read the label

Based on; Edwards S K *et al.* 2022 European guideline for the management of balanoposthitis. *J Eur Acad Dermatol Venereol* 2023;37(6):1104-1117. NICE. Clinical Knowledge Summaries Balanitis. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; 2023. Available from: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/balanitis/management/balanitis-adults/> [Accessed 7/5/24]. BASHH. UK National Guideline on the Management of Vulval Conditions. British Association for Sexual Health and HIV; 2014. Available from: https://www.bashh.org/resources/32/vulval_conditions_2014 [Accessed 7/5/24]. NHS. Balanitis. National Health Service; 2023. Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/balanitis/> [Accessed 7/5/24]. NHS. Lichen sclerosus. National Health Service; 2021. Available from <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lichen-sclerosus/> [Accessed 7/5/24]. BAD. Vulval skincare. British Association of Dermatologists; 2023. Available from: <https://www.bad.org.uk/pills/vulval-skincare/> [Accessed 7/5/24]. National Eczema Society. Female genital eczema. National Eczema Society; 2021. Available from <https://eczema.org/wp-content/uploads/Female-genital-eczema-Jul-21.pdf> [Accessed 4/6/24]