Managing External Vaginal or Vulvar Irritation

**DO NOT USE SCENTED, ANTIBACTERIAL, DEODORIZING OR MEDICATED SOAPS.** You should only use soap that is unscented, “hypoallergenic” and/or “for sensitive skin.” The best brands are Aveeno, Neutragena, and Cetaphil. Some people also do well with Ivory or Eucerin. If you cannot find one of these safe soaps, it is better to use no soap at all than to use an irritating soap. Do NOT use Vagisil, Dove or Summer’s Eve products. Do not douche.

**DO NOT WASH WITH HOT WATER OR SCRUB THE AREA.** Use cool or lukewarm water only.

**AVOID WETNESS.** After washing, make sure your skin is completely air dried before putting on clothes. If your underwear gets wet, change them for a dry pair. Have an extra pair of underwear handy.

**DO NOT SCRATCH**. Scratching can irritate the skin even more. An ice pack, cold compress or a bag of frozen peas outside of your underwear can give you some relief from bad irritation or itching.

**DO NOT WEAR THONGS OR SYNTHETIC UNDERWEAR.** Use cotton underwear only. Avoid harsh seams. Try “seamless” underwear.

**AVOID PANTILINERS.** These usually have perfumes or other chemicals that irritate the skin. If you have to use them, make sure they are unscented. Tampons are better than pads as long as they are unscented. If even tampons cause irritation, you may want to think about getting a silicone menstrual cup such as the Diva Cup.

**AVOID SCENTED LAUNDRY DETERGENTS.** Only use unscented laundry products and dryer sheets for sensitive skin.

**AVOID TOPICAL ANTIBACTERIAL OR YEAST PRODUCTS.** Examples are Monistat, Neosporin. These often worsen the irritation.

**DO NOT USE WET WIPES OR VAGINAL WIPES** unless your doctor says it’s OK. These often will worsen your irritation. Washing is better than wipes!

**AVOID ROUGH TOILET PAPER.** Get the softest toilet paper possible as long as it is unscented.

**LEAN FORWARD WHEN SHAMPOOING and RINSING**

**TRY DOMEBORO SOLUTION SOAKS** Dissolve into a glass of water then soak into washcloth and apply twice a day.

**USE LUBRICANT DURING SEX.** When your skin is very irritated, it’s usually best to wait to have sex until after the irritation is gone. But if you do have sex, you should use lubricant or “lube” to minimize any discomfort. Make sure the lubricant is unscented, hypoallergenic, for sensitive skin. Some brands are KY, Astroglide, Wet, Glide, Replens. Lubricants may be water, oil, or silicone-based. \*condoms are only compatible with water- and silicone-based lubricant.

**USE NON-IRRITATING CONDOMS**. If you get irritation every time you use a condom, then you might be allergic to spermicide or latex. Choose condoms without spermicide. Try latex-free polyurethane, polyisoprene or nitrile condoms. \*Beware, “Lambskin” condoms do not protect against HIV.