

Genital skin care

It is very common for people to get sore skin conditions around the anus and genital area. Some of these are caused by skin problems such as eczema or lichen sclerosus, but many are also caused by simple skin irritation. Often, skin irritation makes skin conditions worse.

The following tips may help.

Avoid irritants

Irritants to genital skin include soaps and detergents (even those specially marketed for use as feminine products). The best thing to wash with is a bland moisturiser, or a soap substitute which is unperfumed. I often recommend QV gentle wash, ZeroAQS cream, or diprobase cream. Rinse well afterwards, and pat dry, then allow a bit of time for air drying properly before applying moisturiser.

Many baby wipes (even the ones “for sensitive skins” that claim to contain no fragrances), will contain preservatives, and these are a very common cause of allergic reaction in sensitive areas. The genital skin is more sensitive than skin elsewhere, and even if the wipes seem Ok for use elsewhere on your body, you may still react to them on the genital area. Look out in particular for a preservative called Methylisothiazolidone (MI) or methylchloroisothiazolidone (MCI), which are common contact allergens.

Avoid detergents on the skin – this includes soaps and shower gels. Showers are better than baths, and ideally wash your whole body with a soap substitute (such as QV gentle, ZeroAQS, or diprobase). Ideally, wash hair forwards over the bath or sink rather than in the shower. However washing hair in the shower is better than washing it in the bath, which is very irritant to genital skin.

Bubble bath is particularly irritant and should be avoided. Talcs, perfumes, deodorants and antiseptics should be avoided. Even water can be irritant, so always moisturise after bathing, showering or washing.

Keep clean, but not excessively so

Applying a bit of moisturiser or barrier cream to the area before going to the toilet may make it easier to clean up afterwards.

It is important to remove all traces of poo from your bottom after going to the toilet, and also to avoid urine in contact with the skin if possible. But over-frequent washing will irritate the skin.

The best way to do this is to just use a flannel wet with water alone after bowel motions, if dry toilet paper is not enough, or is too rough. The flannels can be put in a bucket with a lid and be washed at 60 degrees, with no need to pre-soak or add any antiseptics, just your usual washing powder.

If you have a bit of urinary incontinence, then a barrier cream applied regularly can help – Vaseline is ideal, as it will also moisturise the skin, but any baby nappy cream will also provide good protection (eg zinc and castor oil cream, sudocrem, or metanium). Metanium is yellow and can stain but you don't need to use much and it comes in a small tube which is easily portable. Men should always dry the end of the penis with a bit of toilet tissue after peeing, and if there is any irritation, apply a little bit of barrier cream to the end of the penis.