



Genital Skin Advice

You have been diagnosed as having a genital skin condition which may be made worse by the use of washing powder, perfumed creams and feminine products.

This leaflet is written to give you advice on how this can be minimised to get better control of your genital skin problem.

How did the skin problem arise?

This is an extremely common problem. The products that you use at present dry the skin out and cause cracks to develop that will cause itch and discomfort, therefore we will refer to them in this leaflets as “irritants”.

How can I improve this?

Some products will improve these symptoms in the short term but the skin will not get better until these irritants are avoided.

To ensure that your skin settles down we advise you to change the way you wash as outlined below.

- Stop using the products that you presently use to wash your skin.
- Use a soap substitute to wash **all** of your body in the bath or shower. If you use a soap substitute to wash the genital skin but your normal soap on other parts of the body, you will still get some of this product onto the genital skin and your skin problems will not improve completely.
- Never wash your hair in the bath.
- Never put bubble baths, other perfumed products or essential oils into the bath water.
- When washing hair in the shower do not stand under the shower, but put your head under the stream of water and keep your lower body out.
- Do not use fabric softeners, even those marked as ‘sensitive’ when washing your clothes.
- Do not use 2-in-1 laundry washing products as these contain a fabric softener. The fabric softener stays on towels and underwear and will irritate the skin, and prevent it from settling.
- Do not use any creams, washes or wipes on the genital area without discussing with staff in the clinic.

It is very important to use the prescribed emollient or moisturiser suggested by your GP or dermatologist.

If this causes any irritation, please let us know and this can be changed to another one.

Using emollient several times during the day helps to soothe the genital skin and improve itching.

What is emollient?

Emollient is a Latin word that means “to make soft”. It is a substance that helps soothe, soften and increase moisture levels in the skin. They come in different forms like ointments, gels, creams, sprays and lotions. They help to stop dryness and keep water in the skin. This also protects the skin from the outside environment that can cause irritation and itch.

Ointments are greasy as they are made up from oils. Creams are less greasy as they are a mixture of oil and water. Gels often have added moisturising ingredients and rub in easily. Sprays are good for hard-to-reach areas.

It is useful for genital skin conditions to use the greasy emollients (ointments) at night time, and the lighter emollients (sprays) several times during the day.

Additionally, emollients can be used instead of soap to wash and cleanse your skin.

Although they do not form bubbles, they are still good at cleaning without making your skin dry.

Where can you buy soap substitutes?

You can get soap substitutes from the sensitive skin counter at large chemists/pharmacies. These can be free from any pharmacy on the Pharmacy First Scheme. These products can be used instead of soaps and shower gels.

There are several bath emollients suitable for the bath or shower which you can use instead of bubble bath or shower gel. However they will make the bath slippery so use a non-slip mat, and warn others who use the same bath. Washing-up liquid is the best way to clean the bath after using any bath/shower emollient.

There is also a wide range of emollient creams and ointments which can be used on the genital area after bathing and regularly throughout the day. Some of these are available on prescription from your GP.

How long will it take to settle?

If treatment is continued as advised, your symptoms should settle within a few months.

If you continue to have problems with the genital skin ensure that you have excluded all irritants (this includes commonly used products like antiseptic healing creams, feminine washes or creams for nappy rash).

If you continue to have problems after 3 months, and you think that you are doing everything right, please discuss at your next clinic appointment or attend your GP surgery.

Warning:

Please remember, there is a fire risk with all paraffin-containing emollients, regardless of paraffin concentration and the risk cannot be excluded with paraffin-free emollients.

Emollients can transfer from the skin onto clothing, bedding, dressings, and other fabric and build up over time.

Although emollients are not flammable in themselves or when on the skin, when dried on to fabric they increase the speed of ignition and intensity of the fire.

Developed and reviewed by Gynaecology and Dermatology

LN1061 Reviewed: 05/2024 Review: 05/2026

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