Self-Help Tips for Vulvar Skin Care

While you are seeking effective treatment for vulvar pain, here are some coping measures to relieve symptoms and prevent further irritation. Even when your symptoms are under control, these guidelines are recommended as a preventive strategy.

Clothing and Laundry

- Wear all-white cotton underwear.
- Do not wear pantyhose (wear thigh high or knee high hose instead).
- Wear loose-fitting pants or skirts.
- Remove wet bathing suits and exercise clothing promptly.
- Use dermatologically approved detergent such as Purex or Clear.
- Double-rinse underwear and any other clothing that comes into contact with the vulva.
- Do not use fabric softener on undergarments.

Hygiene

- Use soft, white, unscented toilet paper.
- Use lukewarm or cool sitz baths to relieve burning and irritation.
- Avoid getting shampoo on the vulvar area.
- Do not use bubble bath, feminine hygiene products, or any perfumed creams or soaps.
- Wash the vulva with cool to lukewarm water only.
- Rinse the vulva with water after urination.
- Urinate before the bladder is full.
- Prevent constipation by
    - adding fiber to your diet (if necessary, use a psyllium product such as Metamucil) and
    - drinking at least 8 glasses of water daily.
- Use 100% cotton menstrual pads and tampons.

Sexual intercourse

- Use a lubricant that is water soluble, e.g., Astroglide.
- Ask your physician for a prescription for a topical anesthestic, e.g., Lidocaine gel 5%. (This may sting for the first 3-5 minutes after application.)
- Apply ice or a frozen blue gel pack (lunch box size) wrapped in one layer of a hand towel to relieve burning after intercourse.
- Urinate (to prevent infection) and rinse vulva with cool water after sexual intercourse.

Physical Activities

- Avoid exercises that put direct pressure on the vulva such as bicycle riding and horseback riding.
- Limit intense exercises that create a lot of friction in the vulvar area (try lower intensity exercises such as walking).
- Use a frozen gel pack wrapped in a towel to relieve symptoms after exercise.
- Enroll in a yoga class such as yoga to learn stretching and relaxation exercise.
- Don't swim in highly chlorinated pools.
- Avoid the use of hot tubs.

Everyday Living

- Use a foam rubber donut for long periods of sitting.
- If you must sit all day at work, try to intersperse periods of standing (e.g. rearrange your office so that you can stand while you speak on the phone).
- Learn some relaxation techniques to do during the day (The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook by Davis, Eshelman and McKay or The Chronic Pain Control Workbook by Catalano and Hardin are recommended).