

Feminine Hygiene

What is the best way to keep the genital area clean?

Your skin, including the skin of your genital area, helps to protect you from germs. You need to clean your body to get rid of dirt and germs, but you want your skin to keep its natural oils. Your body's natural oils and discharge keep this area healthy.

The skin and the lining of the vagina are very sensitive. Any chemical or perfume can break down the natural protection of this area, making it easier for the area to become irritated or infected. Gentle daily cleaning of the outside genital skin with mild soap and water is all that you need.

What about vaginal discharge and odor?

The body makes a milky discharge that naturally cleanses the vagina. If you douche or use tampons or pads, you will remove this natural protection against infections and odor. Regular use of minipads can make the body form more discharge than you need in an attempt to protect itself. Use these pads only when you are expecting bleeding with your period or if you have problems with leaking urine. Do not douche unless it is recommended by your healthcare provider.

Everyone's genital area has a normal odor that cannot be removed or covered no matter how much you try. It's best to avoid using pads and tampons that have deodorants or perfumes added to them. They may irritate this area of sensitive skin.

If you have a strong odor or yellow discharge from the vagina, it may be a sign that something is wrong. Tell your healthcare provider if you have these symptoms.

How can I help vaginal dryness caused by menopause?

Women in menopause may notice that their vagina has less natural moisture. Sex may be uncomfortable because of this dryness. The skin cannot protect itself and may need more moisture. There are several ways to take care of this.

- Glycerin or water-based vaginal lubricants, such as K-Y jelly, can help lessen pain during sex. You don't need a prescription for these products. Be sure to use unscented products. Don't use petroleum-based lubricants.
- Hormones prescribed by your healthcare provider can help vaginal tissue be more like it was before menopause. The hormones may be taken in different forms, such as pills, skin patches or lotion, vaginal rings, vaginal cream, or vaginal tablets. You and your provider should discuss the risks and benefits of hormone therapy. Hormone therapy may give relief from vaginal dryness and other symptoms of menopause. However, it may increase the risk for heart disease or stroke. It may also increase the risk of breast cancer and blood clots. Hormone medicines that are put into the vagina (such as vaginal cream) may have fewer of these risks.

What else can I do?

Other important feminine hygiene tips are:

- Change your underwear every day.
- Wear underwear or panty hose with a cotton crotch (instead of synthetic material like nylon) to help pull extra moisture away from the body.
- Wipe from front to back after you use the bathroom.
- Change tampons and pads every 4 to 6 hours when you have your period.
- Sleep without underwear or in loose-fitting pajama bottoms.
- Use unscented tampons, pads, soaps, and toilet paper.
- Don't douche unless your healthcare provider recommends it.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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