

Vulvitis (Caused by Soap)

What is vulvitis?

Vulvitis is when the outer part of the vagina (the vulva) is irritated and inflamed. The main symptom is itching of the vulva. The vulva may become painful. Passing urine may become uncomfortable. This problem almost always occurs in young girls before puberty.

What is the cause?

Most vaginal itching or discomfort is due to a soap irritation of the vulva. The usual irritants are bubble bath, shampoo, or soap left on the genital area. Occasionally, it is due to poor hygiene (such as wiping back to front). Before puberty, the lining of the vulva is very thin and sensitive to any soaps. If the vagina becomes infected, there will be a vaginal discharge.

How long does it last?

The discomfort goes away after 1 to 2 days of proper treatment.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Baking soda, warm water soaks**

Have your daughter soak her bottom in a basin or bathtub of warm water for 10 minutes. Add 4 tablespoons of baking soda per tub of warm water. (Note: Baking soda is better than vinegar soaks for the younger age group). Be sure she spreads her legs and allows the water to cleanse the genital area. No soap should be used. Repeat this twice a day for the next 2 days. This will remove any soap, concentrated urine, or other irritants from the genital area and promote healing. After the symptoms go away, cleanse the genital area once a day with warm water.

- **Hydrocortisone cream**

Apply a tiny amount of 1% hydrocortisone cream (a nonprescription item) to the genital area after the soaks. Do this for 2 days, then stop using it.

- **Prevention of recurrences**

- Only cleanse the genital area with warm water (soap is not needed). If necessary, use baby oil to remove any dried secretions from between the labia that don't come off with water.
- Don't use bubble bath before puberty because it is very irritating. Don't put any other soaps or shampoo into the bath water. Don't let a bar of soap float around in the bathtub. If you are going to shampoo your child's hair, do this at the end of the bath or only during showers.
- Keep the bath time less than 10 minutes. Have your child try to urinate immediately after baths.

- Wear cotton underpants. Underpants made of synthetic fibers (polyester or nylon) don't allow the skin to "breathe." Discourage wearing underpants during the night so the genital area has a chance to "air out."
- Teach your daughter to wipe herself correctly from front to back, especially after a stool.
- Encourage her to drink enough fluids each day to keep the urine light-colored. Concentrated urine can be an irritant.

When should I call my child's healthcare provider?

Call during office hours if:

- The itching is not gone after 48 hours of treatment.
- Vaginal discharge or bleeding occurs.
- Passing urine becomes painful.
- You have other concerns or questions.

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