

It is important to keep the vaginal area clean and healthy. This is called female or feminine hygiene.

Why do females have vaginal discharge?

After puberty, natural hormones in a girl's body may cause an increase in vaginal discharge. The discharge helps protect the body. The amount of discharge can change from:

- Menstrual cycles (periods).
- Sexual activity.
- Some types of birth control.
- Exercise.
- Hormones.
- Infections

Some discharge is normal. A build up of too much vaginal discharge can cause rashes, irritation and odor.

What should I do to keep my vaginal area healthy and clean?

Do:

- Take a shower or bath every day. Use gentle unscented soaps (Dove®, Caress®, Oil of Olay®, Basis®, Cetaphil® and Neutrogena®) and warm water. Open the lips of your vagina and clean between the folds. Don't put soap, other cleaning or scented products inside your vagina.
- Use fingertips for washing
- Gently pat dry, don't rub your vaginal area, before you get dressed.
- Wear underwear with a cotton lining and change it daily.
- Wear loose comfortable clothing. Do not wear pants without underwear. Avoid tights, leggings, leotards and tight pants if you are having problems.
- When going to the bathroom, always wipe from front to back from the vagina to anus.
- If sexually active, always urinate before and after intercourse. Drink water before sex if needed.

Do not:

- Douche, use powders, deodorants or scented products for your vagina. Some odor is normal. Scented products or perfumes will not remove or cover this odor. These products can hurt your body's natural barriers, increase your risk of vaginal infection and/or cause allergic reactions.
- Use bubble baths.
- Sit around in wet clothes or swimsuits.
- Wear panty liners daily.
- Use scented laundry detergents for your underwear or wear underwear that has been heavily bleached

How do tampons and pads affect feminine hygiene?

- Tampons and pads should only be worn when you have your period. They absorb the normal discharge and the menstrual blood. Using mini-pads or panty-liners during other times can cause the body to make too much discharge to try to protect itself. This takes away the body's natural way to protect against infection and odor.
- Change tampons or pads at least every 4 to 6 hours while awake or when they are fully saturated. Be sure to use the right size tampon or pad for your flow.
- Use a pad for overnight

Will shaving around the vaginal area affect feminine hygiene?

Some women choose to shave around the vaginal area. Shaving may make it easier to get a skin infection. If you do shave:

- Use a good quality razor blade. Change the blade often if the razor is not disposable.
- Soak area in warm water like tub or shower for 5 minutes to soften hair and skin
- Use shaving cream for a cleaner shave. Shaving cream helps prevent cuts, razor burn and ingrown hairs. When shaving, be sure to keep the skin in the area taut. Shave in a downward motion to prevent ingrown hairs. Wash off all shaving cream with warm water when done.
- Never share your razor
- Disposable razors are single use

Waxing, tweezing, plucking, threading and hair removal creams can be used instead of shaving.

Helpful Websites

- http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/girls/feminine_hygiene.html
- <https://youngwomenshealth.org/2013/08/22/removing-pubic-hair/>

ALERT: Call your doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if you have:

- Strong vaginal odor or discharge that is yellow or green.
- A change in vaginal discharge.
- A rash, sore (painful or non-painful) or swelling in the vaginal area.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.