

Vulvovaginal care during and after pregnancy

None of the information provided here is a substitute for care and consultation with your healthcare provider. Always consult with your health care provider before beginning any vulvovaginal care.

During pregnancy there is increased blood flow to the vaginal area. Estrogen and progesterone hormones also increase. During this time the vulva can look swollen, have an increase in vaginal discharge, and may be more prone to vaginal infections. Color of the skin of the vulvar may also appear darker.

Because of the changes odors or smells from the vagina may become more noticeable:

- Do not douche
- Do not use vaginal deodorizers
- Some soaps may be an irritant
- Contact your doctor if changes in the color of discharge, burning during urination, strong odor, and/or itching is present

What can be helpful:

- Wear loose fitting clothing like linen pants or most dresses
- Shower regularly-soap may be too much for some women's vagina and a rinse with warm water may be necessary instead
- Reduce length and frequency of baths; Some doctors recommend against it completely
- Using a cotton towel and allow the area to air dry
- Wear breathable cotton underwear or a breathable non-irritating fabric
- Wipe from vagina toward anus after toileting
- Using a clean warm towel against the vulva for itching or irritation
- Using an ice pack, pack of frozen vegetables, sticking ice in a diaper/or pad, or using a frozen pad can help with pain and swelling during pregnancy and post delivery
- Moisturize inner thighs to help with chafing
- Practice good-after sex hygiene-voiding after sex, gently rinsing the area with warm water or warm water and soap

Diet matters:

- Some fruits and vegetables can help keep the body well and help balance the pH levels of the vagina
- Drink plenty of water
- Eat yogurt (if with probiotics consult your OBGYN)

Common infections:

- Group B Strep
- Bacterial Vaginosis
- Trichomoniasis
- Yeast Infection

Bleeding

- Some women experience bleeding in the first trimester of pregnancy-this should look like light bleeding or spotting- Always consult a physician to make sure you and your baby are safe
- Bleeding in the second and third trimester is less common and could be serious
- Post giving birth heavy bright red vaginal bleeding with blood clots can be expected for the first 24 hours
- Bleeding can continue for two to six weeks

Pelvic Floor Exercises

- Strengthening your pelvic floor can be helpful during and after pregnancy
- Can decrease chances of organ prolapse
- Increase vaginal tone
- Help with delivery
- Decrease urinary incontinence

Some recommendations

- Work with a physical therapist that specializes in pelvic floor
- Kegels
- Side lunges
- Deep squats-may need modifications
- Planks-may need modification
- Downward dog modified
- Cow pose
- Cat stretch
- Child's pose

Breathing

- Holding your breath during childbirth can increase the chance of hemorrhoids, prolapse, diastasis recti, and leakage
- Inhale-fill your lungs with air-Exhaling as you push
- Breathing classes can be very helpful

Giving birth

- Some women find that being upright during delivery is more comfortable
It can decrease time in labor
Decrease need for episiotomy
Decrease tearing as well as other common occurrences
Can make pushing easier
- Proper breathing is important
- Having a partner push the hips together from behind during early contractions can help relieve pressure

Stretching

- Perineal massage-loosening the muscles between your vagina and perineum
- Third trimester-34 weeks-exercise
- 1 to 2 times per week
- 1 to 5 minutes
- Should be done when vaginal area is lubricated; i.e. the shower
- Can be done standing with one leg on a chair, laying, or sitting
- Can have a partner help
- Hands should be clean, nails trimmed and clean gloves can be used
- Pure Vitamin E oil or olive oil can be used (if not in shower) near the entrance of the vagina-Again always check with your doctor
- Using thumb-place thumb in entrance of vagina with the inside of the thumb facing the perineum. Place light pressure and move in a U shape going up one side of the vagina wall, back down, over the perineum and up the other side. Repeat for at least 1 min.
- This should not hurt

Lubrication, Sex, and Toys

- For most women it is safe to use lubricant, although not necessary due to the increased moisture in the vagina
- Sex is also generally safe, as well as using toys
- Some women have increased sensation with orgasms during pregnancy
- Keep good toy hygiene

