How to Care for Your Vulva at Home After Surgery

This handout explains how to care for your vulva at home after surgery. It will tell you what to expect, how to keep the area clean and comfortable, and when to call your care team for help.

What will I need at home?

- Soft, clean towels
- At least **one** of the following:
  - squirt bottle/"peri-bottle"
  - a hand-held shower head
- Fragrance free soap
- At least **one** of the following: hair dryer with a cool setting, hand-held fan, or circulating fan
- Loose fitting clothing

What to Expect

Pain
Expect some pain after surgery. Take your pain medicines as prescribed. Follow the directions in your hospital discharge instructions

Swelling and Bruising
You may have some swelling and bruising. Try applying an ice pack wrapped in a towel to the area for 15-20 minutes at a time to help with swelling.

Bleeding
Expect some spotting or blood-tinged drainage for 1-2 weeks. If needed, you may use a loose bandage or pantyliner for comfort but avoid scented products and change often.

Urination
You may notice a change in the direction of your urine stream. It can be helpful to sit further back than usual on the toilet seat. You may feel some external pain when you urinate. This should improve with time as incisions heal.

Home Care

Incision Care
Your incision will be closed with stiches. You may be able to see the stitches on the outside of incision(s). This is normal. Your stitches will dissolve over time.

Check the area of your incision(s) every day for redness, swelling, drainage or wound opening.

Use warm water to rinse your vulva and anal area after you urinate or have a bowel movement. You can use a hand-held shower head or a squirt bottle to do this.

Keep incision(s) clean and dry. Make sure you dry the area after a shower or rinsing. To dry, pat the area with a clean towel, use a hair dryer set on cool, or use a hand-held or circulating fan directed at the area.

Sitz Baths
If you are having pain, you may soak area in a sitz bath for relief. But, limit time to 5-10 minutes and dry the area well after.

Clothing
Wear loose-fitting clothing that will not rub or irritate the incision site. If you want to wear underwear, try underwear that is a size larger or boxer shorts.

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Restrictions

- Do not put anything into the vagina. This includes tampons, your fingers, douching or having sex.
- Avoid sitting for long periods as it will place pressure on the surgical site and may interfere with circulation and healing. If you need to sit, use a soft pillow or donut (sometimes called a "postpartum" pillow) to reduce pressure and make sitting easier.
- Don't rub the incision.
- Don't use soap directly on your incision.
- Do not submerge your incision(s) in water, such as in a bath, pool, or hot tub.

When to Call

- Redness around your incision(s) or skin that is warm to the touch
- Yellow, green, or foul-smelling drainage from incision(s)
- Pain that does not improve with medicine or comfort measures
- Temperature greater than 100.4°F
- Vomiting, not able to tolerate food or liquids by mouth
- Internal pain or burning with urination
- Incision opens up
- No bowel movement for 3 or more days

Who to Call

UW Health | Carbone Cancer Center
Gynecologic Cancer Clinic
608-915-0100

UW Health | Carbone Cancer Center
Rockford Gynecologic Oncology Clinic
779-696-9400

Daily Wound Care Checklist

- ❑ Rinse your vulva and anal area after you urinate or have a bowel movement.
- ❑ Shower daily using fragrance-free soap and water.
- ❑ Dry your vulva after each of the above using one of these methods:
  - Pat dry with a clean towel
  - Use a fan or hair dryer on the cool setting
- ❑ Check the area of your incision for redness, swelling, drainage or wound opening.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8475.