

# Vulvitis from Soap

## Definition

- Irritation of the vulva (external genitals) from soap or other irritants
- Mainly occurs in young girls before school age
- Also called chemical vulvitis

## Health Information

### Symptoms

- Genital itching in young girls (before puberty)
- Usually no pain or burning when passing urine

### Cause

- Main Cause. Bubble bath, shampoo or soap in bath water. Soap can cause the genital area to become red, sore or itchy. This is called "soap vulvitis". Using a soapy washcloth can also be the cause.
- This only occurs in young girls before puberty. Breast buds are the first sign of puberty. The average onset of puberty is 10 years.
- Sometimes, it is due to poor hygiene or back to front wiping.
- If the vagina becomes infected, a vaginal discharge also will occur.

### Diagnosis

- Usually the diagnosis is easy for young girls using bubble bath.
- If irritation also causes pain when passing urine, the urine needs to be checked.
- This is the only way to know if a bladder infection has also occurred.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- Genital itching in young girls is most often caused by soap (especially bubble bath). This vulva area is sensitive to the drying effect of soap.
- Only cleanse the genitals with warm water.
- After puberty, soap can be tolerated.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

### 2. Baking Soda Baths - Young Girls Only:

- Soak for 10 minutes to remove germs and to help with healing.
- Add 2 ounces (60 ml) baking soda per tub of warm water.
- Reason: Baking soda is better than vinegar for young girls.
- During soaks, be sure she spreads her legs. This allows the water to cleanse the genitals.
- Repeat baking soda soaks 2 times per day for 2 days.

### 3. Steroid Cream:

- Put a tiny amount of 1% hydrocortisone cream on the genitals.
- No prescription is needed.
- Use after soaks for 1 or 2 days. Do not use more than 2 days.

4. **Prevention - Do Not Use Soaps:**

- Do not use bubble bath, soap and shampoo in the bath water. They can cause the genitals to be red, sore or itchy.
- Only use warm water to cleanse the genitals.
- Baby oil can be used to remove any dried body fluids.
- After puberty, soap can be used.

5. **What to Expect:**

- If soap is the cause, the pain should go away within 24 hours.
- Itching or skin redness may last 2 days.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Itching lasts over 48 hours using this care advice
- Vaginal discharge or bleeding occurs
- Passing urine becomes painful
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### Pediatric Care Advice

**Author:** Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

**Copyright 2000-2022** Schmitt Pediatric Guidelines LLC

**Disclaimer:** This health information is for educational purposes only. You the reader assume full responsibility for how you choose to use it. The information contained in this handout should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Listing of any resources does not imply an endorsement.