**Healthy Vulva = Healthy You**

As the summer is approaching in our resort area, we anticipate many new cases of vulvar irritation and concerns. On a daily basis we take care of women who have pain, burning, itching, redness, rashes, and other discomforts “down there.” The vulva is the external genitalia that includes the clitoris, clitoral hood, labia minora, labia majora, outer urethra, and outer vagina. The vulva comes in various shapes, sizes, shades, and with slight variations. And, the vulva is made of sensitive skin with many folds and nerve endings. Here are some tips for you:

1. Use only super mild soap (such as dove sensitive, aveeno, pears) and water to wash down there. Some doctors recommend only water for washing.
2. No wash cloths or loufas. This may make little scratches on delicate skin. Your hand is best for cleaning. The skin on the vulva is similar to the skin around your eyes or the skin of your lips.
3. No perfumes or harsh chemicals. No fancy body wash, powders or bubble bath.
4. Pat or air dry after showers. Some women use a hair dryer, just make sure it is on a cool setting!
5. Sleep commando! (we recommend no underwear at night; encourage little girls to sleep this way, too.) Let the vulva breathe.
6. No scented tampons or pads.
7. No douching. The vagina is like a self cleaning oven and will restore its normal pH if given time.
8. Wear white cotton underwear (at least cotton crotch) and avoid thongs.
9. Get out of those sweaty gym clothes or wet bathing suit ASAP. If you wear a two piece swim suit, bring a skirt to the beach and slip the bottoms off while you aren’t swimming.
10. Shaving, depiliatory creams and waxing are all damaging and can lead to in-grown hairs. Laser hair removal or electrolysis is probably the best for vulvar skin if you must.
11. Coconut oil is a great vulvar moisturizer and is soothing. Can also be used as a lubricant for intercourse, EXCEPT when using a condom! (water based lubricant should be used with a condom). Vaseline or calendula ointment can also be used as a skin protectant, but only apply to clean dry skin because they will trap in moisture.
12. Wipe from front to back. Also this will prevent urinary tract infections.
13. Avoid baby wipes or the newer flushable wipes on the vulva.
14. Sugary stuff should stay out of the vagina and off of the vulva. No whipped cream, honey, etc.
15. After intimacy, rinse the vulva with lukewarm water and pat dry.

See your gynecologist with any problems; we are happy to see you! Chronic irritation or a particular spot that seems out of the ordinary should be evaluated. Sometimes, a biopsy may need to be done, and often we can offer treatments beyond simple hygiene measures.