

# Care after your vulvar surgery

## Vulva

After surgery you will have some swelling and tenderness in the vulvar area that will get better with time. You will also have stitches in the vulvar area. They may appear blue or black in colour. These stitches dissolve, so they do not need to be removed. Your incisions and stitches need some care to stay clean and to heal:

1. **While you are urinating**, spray warm water over the vulvar area to prevent urine from stinging the incision. Your nurse will provide you with a spray bottle before you go home from the hospital.
2. **After a bowel movement**, wipe from front to back to avoid getting the incision dirty. You may use an unscented baby wipe if you wish.
3. **You should have a sitz bath 3 to 4 times per day.** A sitz bath is a basin filled with warm water that sits in the toilet just under the toilet seat. Your nurse will provide you with a sitz bath basin before you go home from the hospital. At first use warm water only. After the incisions have healed, you can add Epsom salts if you wish.
4. **After a sitz bath or regular bathing you must dry the vulvar area very well.** Be sure to use a clean washcloth and towel each time you bathe. To dry the area, you may use a hair dryer on “cool” held at least 12 inches or at knee level away from the vulvar area. When sitting or lying down, try to keep your legs apart. When sleeping, try lying on your side with a pillow between your knees. For healing, it is important to keep this area as dry as possible. These positions will help.
5. **To decrease the amount of stress on your incision and stitches**, the nurse in the hospital will teach you how to “log roll” out of bed. You may wish to hold a small pillow between your legs to help you get up.

## Drains

You may have drains in one or both of your upper thighs. This is to drain the fluid that may be in the tissues after the lymph nodes from that area have been removed. The remaining lymph nodes will take over and drain this fluid, but this may take a few weeks to months to happen.

The drains are usually removed when they drain less than 30 mL in 24 hours or on the 7<sup>th</sup> day after surgery. The home care nurse will help you care for these drains. The fluid in the drainage bottle may vary in colour from red to a clear yellow. Be careful not to pull on these drains, as it may cause pain and may cause the drains to fall out.

## What to watch for

- **Signs of infection**

These include redness, bad odour, increased tenderness and/or fever. **If you have these symptoms please let your visiting nurse know or call your oncologist.** You may need medication to help clear the infection.

- **Leg swelling**

If you have swelling of your legs, try to raise them as much as you can. **If the swelling becomes an ongoing problem, please discuss this with your oncologist.** You may need special support stockings.

- **Numbness or tenderness to the vulvar area**

This may last anywhere from a number of weeks to months. As the area heals and the swelling goes down this may improve. The vulvar tissue normally provides some padding and now that it has been removed, it may feel different when sitting, especially for long periods of time. Some women find it more comfortable to sit on a soft pillow.

- **A change in direction of your urine flow**

This is unavoidable in some instances due to the location of the cancer and the surgery performed. Some creative positioning may be needed – such as sitting further back on the toilet seat or urinating through a toilet paper roll or a cup with the end cut out of it.

- **Sexual side effects**

Depending on the site of the surgery, you may have some sexual changes. This may vary from a sensation of numbness to discomfort as the padding normally found on the vulva may be reduced. Changes in positioning usually help relieve this discomfort.

**If you have any further concerns, you may contact:**

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**at 905-387-9495**