



Skin Care for Urinary and Fecal Incontinence

Problems, Solutions and Suggestions

Our skin performs many functions – it protects us from infection, insulates our body from heat and cold, regulates our body temperature, produces Vitamin D and provides sensation. Urine and fecal matter touching our skin may cause problems resulting in skin damage.

Why does urinary & fecal incontinence cause skin problems?

There are many reasons why this happens:

Too much wetness from urine and fecal matter irritates our skin. Damage is more likely to occur when the skin is saturated by these bodily fluids. Also, when there is wetness and the skin rubs against incontinence pads, clothing or linen it gets even worse. There is very little flexibility in the skin when it's too damp.

Changes in the skin pH from urine and feces can also irritate the skin and allow bacteria and yeast to grow. Fecal incontinence can potentially cause even more damage than urine, especially when it is liquid (diarrhea).

Everyone with urinary and or fecal incontinence is at risk of developing skin breakdown due to the factors mentioned above. Health care professionals call this Incontinence Associated Dermatitis (IAD). It can be painful and disrupt your daily routines. However, there are solutions to help prevent IAD.

Signs of skin problems

The first signs of skin problems can be a pale pinkish to deep red appearance. The skin may burn, feel itchy and may be painful. Sometimes the skin will feel rough or appear cracked. It may even have blisters.

Yeast infections are also common. A yeast infection is a reddish, spotty rash and can be very itchy. Medicated creams or powders are available to treat these. You will need to have a prescription from your physician or nurse practitioner.

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Skin care products

Healthy skin is the first line of defense against skin problems. A variety of products can help. There are two types of skin care products:

- Cleansers
- Barriers

Cleansers

Special skin cleansers clean the skin better than soap because they will not dry your skin like ordinary soaps. Use the skin cleanser in combination with a soft wash cloth or a cleanser which is already in a soft wipe. Clean the skin as soon as possible after each episode of incontinence. Cleansers may perform the following function:

- Remove urine or stool
- Soothe
- Eliminate odor
- Reduce burning and stinging
- Disinfect
- Provide protection

Cleansers are available in foam, spray, lotion or wipes. If using public washrooms, the wipes may be convenient to carry with you. Cleansers can be Rinse or No-Rinse. No-Rinse cleaners do not have to be rinsed with water, and some may also produce an extra protective layer. If there are signs of irritation, redness or odor, they should be used after every incontinence episode. No-Rinse formulas that are pH balanced are preferred. Avoid fragranced versions if you have sensitive skin. If the cleaner also leaves a little barrier or moisturizer after each use, that is even better.

Barriers

Barriers protect your skin from urine and fecal matter. Use a urine and fecal barrier rather than a moisturizer in the perineal area to prevent skin irritation. They perform the following function:

- Provide a coating on the skin that urine and feces cannot penetrate
- Some barriers are formulated to help reduce friction from linen, clothing or incontinence pads

Barrier products are available in creams, ointments, wipes, and barrier films. Barriers are very beneficial if you have fragile skin or have frequent incontinence. Use after cleansing if there is skin soreness or redness. Some zinc based formulas can be hard to remove. Use a barrier that does not have sensitizers such as fragrance or lanolin. Products which are designed to provide urine and fecal protection will mention this on their label. The active ingredients list is important for you to understand the level of barrier protection you will receive. Experts suggest products with dimethicone at 1% or higher and it must be listed in the active ingredients list.

Note: Baby powder and corn starch are not barrier products.

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Where can I buy skin care products?

1. Pharmacy
2. Home Health Care stores
3. Department or grocery stores (may have limited supply)
4. Amazon.ca – look for a trusted brand name and read reviews. Try searching for “incontinence products” to find a meaningful list

In the store, you may find skin care products in any of the following places:

- Near incontinence products
- In the skin care section close to body lotions
- Near the feminine hygiene products such as sanitary napkins

Prevention of IAD and skin problems related to Urinary and Fecal Incontinence:

The first step in managing skin problems is to prevent them! To do this, skin care with proper products is necessary. Here are some important tips to follow when caring for your skin on a day-to-day basis:

1. Inspect your perineal skin daily for any signs of redness or irritation.
2. Gently cleanse skin with a cleanser after each incontinence episode, during/after bathing, and then pat dry.
3. Avoid scrubbing your skin as this can cause friction and injure the skin. Use a soft cloth or wipe that is pH balanced and free of sensitizers (eg. Fragrances).
4. Apply a barrier product to help protect your skin.
5. If you use absorbent pads, diapers or condom catheter systems, change them regularly to prevent problems from the urine and fecal matter touching the skin.

Where can I get help?

Skin problems can usually be prevented by simple care and the use of appropriate products. However, problems still do arise. Your nurse continence advisor, nurse, physician, nurse practitioner, physiotherapist or pharmacist will be able to assist or offer suggestions. This is a common problem – do not be hesitant or embarrassed to ask for help.

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