

Having a Sitz Bath at Home

For patients with irritated or damaged skin under the pelvic or bottom area (including the anus, vagina or scrotum)

In this pamphlet, you will learn:

- What a sitz bath is and how it can help
- How to have a sitz bath at home
- Skincare tips for the bottom area



A sitz bath is often recommended for people who have irritation to their perineal or bottom area (area between the legs, including the anus, vagina or scrotums).

The skin may be ulcerated, cracked, raw or blistered because of:

- diarrhea
- hemorrhoids
- surgery
- radiation
- chemotherapy

What is a sitz bath?

A sitz bath is a warm soothing soak for your perineal or bottom area (area between your legs including your anus, vagina or scrotums). The soak is made up of water and baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) or salt. You can buy baking soda or salt in a drug or grocery store.

How can a sitz bath help?

A sitz bath:

- ✓ cleanses
- ✓ reduces the chances of infection
- ✓ soothes the skin (usually helps you feel more comfortable)
- ✓ increases blood circulation to the area to help with healing

How often should I have a sitz bath?

How often you have a sitz bath depends on what you are using it for.

To soothe your skin, a general guide is to try and have a sitz bath **4 times a day**. You can have sitz baths more or less often depending on your comfort.

Some people have a sitz bath after each bowel movement if their anal area is very sore.

Your nurse or doctor can tell you what is best for you.

How do I take a sitz bath?

There are 2 ways you can take a sitz bath.

You may use:

1. A plastic sitz bath that fits onto your toilet.
2. Your bathtub at home.

Sitz baths are available in the hospital or at your local drug store.

Using a plastic sitz bath on the toilet

1. Rinse the sitz bath to remove any soap or salt residue.
2. Lift the toilet seat and put the plastic sitz bath in the toilet bowl like in the picture.
3. Fill the plastic sitz bath two-thirds (2/3) full with warm water, not hot water. The water temperature should be 37 °Celsius to 39 ° Celsius or 99 °Farhenheit to 102 °Farhenheit. If the water feels too warm on your wrist, it is too hot to sit in.
4. Add ½ to 1 tablespoon (5 mL to 15 mL) of baking soda or 1 to 2 teaspoons (5 mL to 10 mL) of salt to the water in the plastic sitz bath. Swirl the water until the baking soda or salt dissolves.
5. Carefully sit down in the plastic sitz bath and soak your bottom area for 10 to 15 minutes. As you sit down, the extra water will spill into the toilet through the openings in the plastic sitz bath.
6. When finished, dry your bottom by patting the area with a clean lint-free towel. Another way to dry the area is to use a blow dryer set on low or use a hand-held fan. You could also lie down and rest as your bottom area dries.
7. Try and leave your bottom open to the air as much as possible. Use cotton underwear with no elastic along the leg holes. Oversized boxer shorts are great.
8. Clean the plastic sitz bath each time you use it.



Using your bathtub at home

1. Rinse the bathtub before using to remove any soap or salt residue.
2. Fill the bathtub with enough warm water to cover your thighs, or about 5 inches (13 centimetres) deep.
3. The temperature of the water should be warm, not hot—about 37 °Celsius to 39 °Celsius, or 99 °Fahrenheit to 102 °Fahrenheit. If the water feels too warm on your wrist, it is too hot to sit in.
4. Add ½ cup (125 mL) of baking soda or ¼ cup (75 mL) of salt to the bath water. Swirl the water until the baking soda or salt is dissolved.
5. Carefully enter the bath, sit down and soak your bottom area for 10 to 15 minutes. Lean backwards in the tub, rather than sitting directly on your bottom, so the water can reach the whole area.
6. When finished get out of the bath and dry your bottom by patting the area with a clean, lint-free towel. Another way to dry the area is to use a blow dryer set on low or use a hand-held fan. You could also lie down and rest until your bottom area dries.
7. Try and leave your bottom open to the air as much as possible. Use cotton underwear with no elastic along the leg holes. Oversized boxer shorts are great.
8. Clean the bathtub after each use.



Skin care tips

Use soaps and lotions

You can use soaps and lotions you normally use, as long as the skin on your bottom area is not raw or broken. If it is, talk to your nurse or doctor about which soaps and lotions you can use.

If you are getting radiation or chemotherapy treatment, talk to your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist first.

Using hydrocortisone cream or other ointments prescribed by your doctor

You can still use any hydrocortisone cream or other ointments that your doctor prescribed, like Flamazine or Zinc and Castor Oil. You may choose to put it on after your skin dries — even on broken or cracked skin.

Use as much of the cream or ointment you need and put it on as often as you need to keep comfortable. You will be using the cream or ointment for a short time and the amount absorbed will not hurt you. (The note on the jar or tube which says “use sparingly” is for a person using the cream or ointment for a long time).

If there is some bleeding or discharge

Irritated areas often leak fluid as they heal. Clear, somewhat white fluid and blood streaks or specks are common. That is part of the healing process.



Tell your doctor or nurse right away if you get:

- Heavy bleeding
- Bad smelling fluid
- A fever
- Swelling or redness in your area

These could be signs of an infection.

Continuing with sex and other intimacies

You do not need to stop having sex or other intimacies while taking sitz baths unless your doctor told you.

But, if sex is uncomfortable or painful for you, check with your nurse or doctor.

Visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca for more health information.

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Form: D-5391 | Author: Patient Education and updated by Toral Patel | Reviewed: 2019