

# 67 Labia of Love

Move over, soap and water. Feminine hygiene products get 'vajuvenated' as these new-generation intimate care brands offer skin-compatible products that have been formulated for the vulva.

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We've been told to treat our scalp like the skin on our faces and have seen the 'skinfication' of the scalp with the boom in scrubs, serums and the like. Our faces are the first to receive the most love with extensive 10-step skincare regimes, monthly facials and aesthetic tune-ups, but what about the skin around the vulva?

"When it comes to taking care of ourselves, I believe vulva care is one of the last things that comes to mind for many," says Cynthia Chua, founder of prebiotics-based face-to-vulva care line, Two Lips. "The skin around our vulva is often neglected and we tend to only pay attention to the area when we experience symptoms like itchiness, rashes or bumps."

So why wait until such issues arise and is there even a need for daily vulva care?

"The vulva includes all of the tissues that surround our sexual organs, which include the fleshy outer lips of the vulva and the thinner more delicate flaps known as labia majora and minora, respectively," says Dr Sylvia Ramirez, medical and scientific director of Cutis Medical Laser Clinics in Singapore. Keeping our vulva and vaginal areas clean and healthy is essential given that "our vulva is even more sensitive than the skin on our face".

Our vulva's microbiome is a delicate ecosystem that can sometimes be thrown off balance by a number of factors: our warm climate, diet, grooming habits and even choice of underwear all play a part in the health of this intimate zone.

"Our humidity is definitely a challenge for a healthy vulva as a moist environment promotes the overgrowth of bacteria and other organisms," says Ramirez, who treats patients for a spectrum of concerns from permanent hair reduction, to pigmentation, vulva irritation and break outs.

"Some women may experience chronic dampness in the vulva area usually from friction when thighs touch together, combined

with using the wrong type of underwear and the use of tight pants or even workout clothing. These can have a negative impact on a woman's vulva health as keeping dry is important."

If keeping our Y-zone clean and dry is essential, does that automatically mean that cleansers and other aesthetically pleasing intimate care products will help eliminate some of these issues—or are feminine hygiene brands putting marketing ahead of science to create a need where none exists?

"I feel critics who say this have it slightly confused," says Chua. "The vagina is self-cleaning, but the skin around the vulva is just like the skin on the rest of our body."

Ramirez however, encourages caution and a minimalist approach, sharing that aggressive cleansing may result in irritation as "even products that are labelled as designed for vulva care can contain chemicals that could irritate or cause contact dermatitis. Vulva irritation most commonly results from heat or wetness, but can also be a reaction to creams, fragrances and clothing."

If you are looking for skin-compatible products that can help you cleanse and care for the Y-zone, read on. »

**DR RAMIREZ'S TIPS TO A HAPPY AND HEALTHY Y-ZONE**

Keep your intimate zones dry, friction-free and away from unnecessary irritants, advises Dr Sylvia Ramirez, medical and scientific director of Cutis Medical Laser Clinics in Singapore.

Ditch G-strings and thongs in favour of cotton underwear, even avoiding underwear when sleeping at night. Shapewear, girdles and tight gym clothes "may also result in irritation as these trap heat and moisture, resulting in an environment that promotes the growth of organisms". Hence, changing out of your sweaty workout gear as soon as possible is a must.

Avoid shaving or the use of hair removal products on the vulva. "Use scissors to trim the pubic hair close to the vulva or choose to have laser hair removal."

Take a less-is-more approach in selecting your intimate care products, as many problems in the vulva are self-inflicted. "Products that are suitable for the vulva area are particularly bland without any irritating ingredients."



## restore

If you strive for smooth and supple skin all over—vulva area included—you'll be pleased to know that there are several lightweight moisturisers and masks specially formulated for use around the Y-zone.

Lady Suite Rejuvenating Botanical Oil for the Glow Below, \$78, from Sugared. Whether you wax, shave, sugar or laser, this lightweight oil helps protect the skin on your vulva against dehydration, redness, bumps and ingrown hairs.

Alexandria Professional Phenomenal Skin Repair Mini, \$50. Confession: we may or may not have used this on both our lips and vulva, it's just that versatile. It can be used by everyone with or without vulvas to calm, rehydrate and soften skin while relieving ingrown hairs. It also doubles (or triples) as a cuticle, scar and stretch mark treatment. A little goes a long way.

Two Lips Sleepover Repairing Night Mask, \$100. This overnight mask can be used on the face and vulva for smoother, rejuvenated skin. It replenishes and repairs skin with prebiotics and olive oil extract, and is suitable for sensitive skin and areas that have undergone IPL, laser and waxing.

Rosebud Woman Honor Everyday Balm, US\$90. We perform *gua sha* and other smooth moves on our face, why not on our Y-zone too? For soft and supple skin, tenderly massage this melt-on balm over external creases and folds to hydrate, rebuild and lubricate the skin with white meadow foam, ginger and anti-inflammatory chamomile. This bedside essential may be used as part of your pre- and post-natal perineum and labia care, and is also especially comforting for menopausal skin. We also love Rosebud's Soothe Calming Cream, US\$40, a cooling lotion that calms irritated, tender or swollen skin.

## cleanse

Just as we wash our faces daily, these Y-zone cleansers were designed for the parts of your intimate area that experience sweat from workouts, humidity, periods and sex.

Two Lips Rinse Cleanser, \$55. A pH-balanced, top-to-toe skin cleanser that removes impurities without stripping your skin. We're obsessed with its relaxing frankincense scent that makes every shower experience a treat, as plant-based prebiotics and lactic acid get to work in cleansing and refreshing skin.

Sugared Intimate Wipes, \$8 for 20 wipes. Freshen up in a flash with these fragrance-free, gentle-on-skin wipes.

Lady Suite Probiotic Refreshing Cleanser for Harmony Down South, \$32, from Sugared. This cleansing gel contains a blend of prebiotics, botanical extracts and rose quartz to help cleanse, condition and soften your Y-zone.



## scrub

Two Lips Scrubbs Konjac Jelly Scrub, \$70. It comes with biodegradable konjac jelly beads and non-GMO olive stone powder to buff away grime, dirt and dead skin cells that may lead to irritation or the ingrowth of hair.

Fur Silk Scrub, US\$49.29, from Net-a-Porter. It's gentle enough to be used daily, after a close shave or last-minute wax appointment, or enjoyed as a once-a-week mask when left on for up to 10 minutes. It contains bromelain, a natural exfoliant found in pineapples, moisturising jojoba, papaya, glycerin and hydrogenated castor oil beads to buff and polish the skin.



## treat

Alexandria Professional Mud Puddle Hungarian Wellness Mud, \$44, from Sugared. According to Stephanie de Braux, Sugared's head of operations, this product detoxifies and rejuvenates areas around the inner thighs, pubic bone and outer labia (avoid the delicate inner labia and vaginal entrance as those zones don't require exfoliation or detoxifying).

Fur Ingrown Concentrate, \$50, from Sugared. Spot treat your ingrown hairs and irritable areas with this dermatologically tested formula infused with tamanu and chamomile extracts. Best of all, it's versatile enough to be used on areas that are prone to redness such as your legs or underarms (hello, razor burn) and gentle enough for sensitive skin.

Malin+Goetz Ingrown Hair Cream, \$61, from Beauty Emporium. Ingrown hairs and razor bumps don't stand a chance with this hair cream, which is formulated with papaya and pineapple enzymes as well as glycolic and salicylic acids to gently exfoliate and smoothen skin.

