Common Hygiene Practice Linked to Increased Risk of Uterine Fibroids

Among Black women who applied talc in the perineal area, some were more likely to develop uterine fibroids.

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Many women's hygiene regimens include douching and dusting talc on the perineal area. In a new study published in the Journal of Women's Health, researchers at Michigan State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences assessed the impact of these practices on uterine fibroid risk. Although scientists found no evidence to suggest that douching was culpable in the development of uterine fibroids, they identified the use of talc as a risk factor for their development, according to Contemporary OB/GYN.

Uterine fibroids are tumors that develop on the uterus. While these tumors are usually noncancerous, they can cause menstrual pain, heavy bleeding and reproductive problems, including infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth.

One of the most common gynecological conditions in the world, fibroids affect women of all races. But Black women are disproportionately susceptible to the problem for reasons that remain unclear.

For the study, researchers recruited 1,693 young Black women between ages 23 and 35 in the Detroit area to undergo an ultrasound and answer questions about their lifestyle, including whether they ever douched or used perineal talc.

None of the women had previously been diagnosed with uterine fibroids. However, ultrasound results showed that 23% of the women had uterine fibroids. Of these, 43% reported ever douching and 15% confirmed ever applying talc to their genitals.

Researchers found that douching was not associated with the development of fibroids, but perineal talc application was. Specifically, women who had applied talc to their genitals were more likely to develop fibroids of any size than those who had not used products containing this ingredient.

Scientists explained that although talc fibers introduced into uterine tissue could cause localized damage and inflammation, the topic requires further study.

In addition, researchers suggested that more lab work should be done on talc's potential ability to cause tumors on the outer layer of the uterus.

For more on reproductive wellness, read "Women and Sexual Health." And for more on uterine fibroid management, read "Understanding Your Treatment Options for Uterine Fibroids."

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