



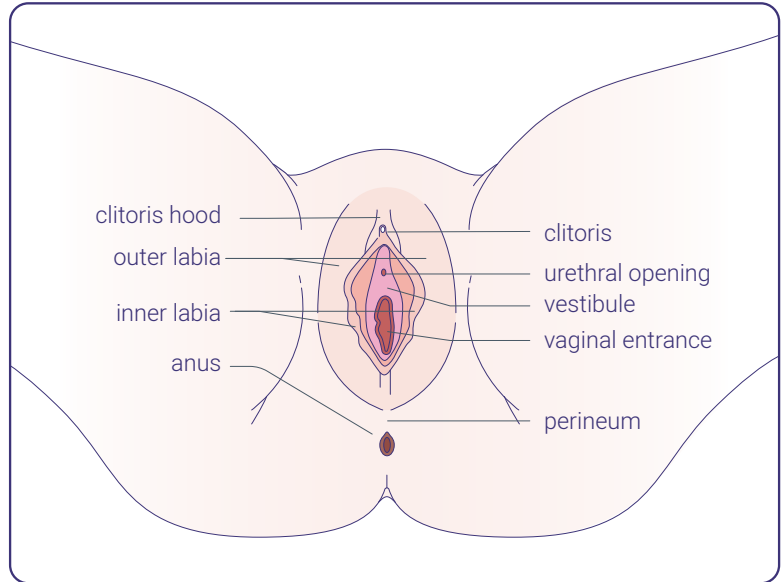
Vulva care

Not for use after vulva surgery

Outpatient information

The female external genitalia is known as the vulva. The vulva is very sensitive and has a rich blood supply. Several secretions are associated with the vulva, including urine, sweat, blood and mucus. There is a great deal of normal variation in vulval appearance.

The vulval skin is commonly exposed to irritants, which can result in symptoms. Commonly the symptoms are caused by a form of dermatitis or recurrent infection, which can sensitise the vulval skin. These symptoms can be a source of significant discomfort and distress for patients. Fortunately, symptoms can be greatly improved by adherence to recommended vulval care guidelines and specific medications prescribed by your doctor.



This vulva image was created by Jean Hailes for Women's Health and permission was granted by the owner to use this image. The image has been stylised from the original version.

The vulva self-exam

A regular self-exam will help you to be aware of changes that need ongoing evaluation.

- Wash hands carefully.
- Lie or sit in a comfortable position with good lighting and a hand mirror.
- Gently separate the outer lips of the vulva.
- Look for redness, swelling, discolouration, blisters, bumps and/or rough areas.
- Next, separate the inner lips and look carefully at the area between them for the same changes. Also look at the entrance of the vagina.
- Gently pull back the skin covering the clitoris and examine the clitoris.
- Be sure to inspect the area around the urethra, perineum, anus, around the labia majora and the mons pubis

How to care for the vulva

- Clean vulval area with water only as it is the ideal agent.
- Avoid using soaps, detergents and scented products
 - » QV, Sorbolene or Dermeze wash can be used if you prefer
 - » Consider washing hair in the sink to avoid shampoo coming into contact with the vulval area.
- Rinse vulval skin off with plain, warm water frequently
 - » Avoid soaking in hot water
 - » Avoid scrubbing area with flannels, use gentle hands
 - » Gently pat dry or use hairdryer on low, cool air.
- Use a bland moisturiser such as Dermeze ointment, which will also act as a barrier.
- Try to source products for sensitive skin that are sulphate and paraben free
 - » Products that claim to be hypoallergenic or 'baby friendly' are best avoided
 - » Avoid Benzocaine, an ingredient found in some anti-itch preparations, as it causes rebound itching.
- Avoid cheap jewellery and nail polish coming into contact with the vulval area.
- Avoid shaving or waxing as much as possible.
- Minimise swimming in pools, saunas, and spa baths if symptomatic
 - » Rinse the vulval area with fresh water to remove chlorine after swimming.
- If urine aggravates the area, rinse with warm water as a matter of routine
 - » Squirt bottles, bidets or handheld showers can be helpful.
- If the anus is irritated, consider cutting white flannel squares and placing in warm water
 - » Wipe the anus with the wet flannel front-to-back and discard or wash the flannel.

Sanitary and vulval products

- Consider unbleached, unscented tampons/ sanitary pads or those made with 100% cotton or washable, reusable cotton menstrual pads.
- Tampons with an applicator may be easier to insert.
- Use the appropriate tampon for the flow you are experiencing.
- Other alternatives to tampons include cups that are worn internally and are reusable.
- Avoid using panty liners for vaginal discharge as they contain bleach.

Clothing

- Wear white, 100% cotton underwear and avoid wearing underwear at night
 - » Avoid G string-style and synthetic fabric.
- Wash new underwear with a mild detergent before wearing.
- After washing underwear, put it through at least one cycle with water only
 - » Rinsing clothes thoroughly is more important than which detergent is used
 - » Fabric softeners and dryer sheets should not be used.
- Do not wear pantyhose, tights, or other close-fitting clothes. If you cannot avoid wearing pantyhose, cut the crotch out leaving a small amount of fabric to prevent laddering.
- Remove exercise clothing and wet bathers as soon as possible.

Solutions to soothe

- In a basin or bowl, add 2 tbsp of bicarbonate of soda or ¼ tsp of salt per litre of water.
- In the bath, add 1 cup of bicarbonate of soda or a handful of salt.
- Mix 1 tsp of salt + 600ml of water in a saltwater spray bottle and apply during and after urinating to soothe
 - » Lean forward when urinating and relax pelvic floor.
- Apply a compress of oiled Aveeno (powdered oatmeal bath treatment) to vulva 3 or 4 times a day
 - » Mix 2 tbsp of Aveeno in 1L of water, mix in jar and refrigerate
 - » Helpful after intercourse or when experiencing burning and/or itching.
- An icepack made with crushed ice placed in a plastic bag and then wrapped in a moist cloth can be placed on the area for 10 minutes at a time for flare-ups.
- Gel packs can be helpful.
- Gentle heat, such as a warm bath or wheat bag/water bottle wrapped in towel, can help relieve aches.

Intimacy

- If sex is uncomfortable for you, stop. Persevering can make matters worse. You may also have a degree of vaginismus (tight pelvic floor muscles) secondary to the anticipation of pain, and this will need to be dealt with separately. Your doctor can refer you to a women's health physiotherapist.
- Avoid condoms and spermicidal creams/gels if they increase irritation.
- Use lubricants suggested by healthcare provider to make intercourse more comfortable. Silicone products last well, are hypoallergenic and are safe with condoms
 - » Natural and readily available options include vitamin E oil, vegetable oil, coconut oil, olive oil or saliva
 - » K-Y jelly dries the skin so best to avoid, Surgilube is thicker.

Other options include:

1. **Slippery Stuff:** Silken gel, water based, odourless, long-lasting, and latex compatible
2. **Astroglide:** Light, long-lasting, water-soluble, odourless/flavourless
3. **Femigel:** Natural product from tea trees for vaginal dryness
4. **Replens:** 12 single-use applications, medium thickness, does not dissolve too quickly; must be used several times a week
5. **Sylk:** Made of kiwi fruit vine and purified water from NZ; mimics natural secretions.

General information

Although some vulval conditions cannot be cured, the symptoms can be controlled in the long term. If you have a dermatological condition affecting the vulval skin, at times a biopsy will be necessary to help with your diagnosis. This helps the doctor treat your condition and can also exclude pre-malignant changes (VIN). VIN is normally symptomatic and appears as a localised, white, raised area.

After a biopsy, keep the area clean and avoid application of creams or ointments. Sitz baths twice a day for three or four days will aid healing. Avoid intercourse until the biopsy site is healed.

In general, avoid over the counter and home remedies as they commonly contain irritants and the fewer products you apply to the vulval area, the better.

If you develop vulval symptoms or notice a change in the vulval skin that persists or have concerns, talk to your GP or call Healthdirect on 1800 022 222.

Useful links

- thewomens.org.au
- caredownthere.com.au
- jeanhailes.org.au
- anzvs.org
- shfpact.org.au



The information provided is for information purposes only. If you are a patient using this publication, you should seek assistance from a healthcare professional when interpreting these materials and applying them to your individual circumstances.



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