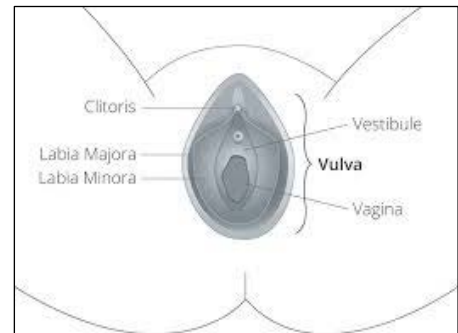


# Vulval Skin Care

## Patient Information – Gynaecology Services

### What is the vulva?

The vulva is the area that is from the mons pubis (over the pubic bone), out to the groins, around to join the buttocks and in towards the opening of the vagina. It includes the labia (the inner and outer vaginal lips), the clitoris, the perineum and the vestibule (the part of the vulva between the labia minora into which the urinary opening and the vaginal opening are found). There are three types of skin – hair bearing skin, hairless skin and mucosa (going into the vagina). Vulval skin can become irritated, dry or chapped.



### What are the symptoms of a vulval skin condition?

Many women will have experienced symptoms, which can occur at any age. The most common problems are itching, pain, soreness and a change in the skin colour and texture. These symptoms may be caused by a condition that only affects the vulva, or they can sometimes be a sign of a more general medical problem or other skin disease. Some skin conditions can be completely cured and others will need on-going treatment to keep under control and symptom free.

### Tips for care of the vulva

Vulval skin is very sensitive so it is important to avoid irritants that may make symptoms worse. Follow the advice and recommendations of your gynaecologist and/or dermatologist.

#### Clothing and washing clothes

- Wear cotton-rich underwear. Colour doesn't usually matter but dark dyes can be an irritant for some people. Avoid wearing underwear while sleeping – loose boxer shorts or pyjamas are other options.
- Period or bladder leakage underwear is usually better than using disposable pads or pantliners.
- Avoid close fitting clothes such as tights, leggings, tight jeans and cycling shorts. At times, you may find it more comfortable to wear loose-fitting clothes without underwear.
- Remove wet swimming togs as soon as possible.
- Use hypoallergenic/sensitive products where possible. Avoid using fabric conditioners and tumble dryer sheets, biological washing products and ones that are advertised as being anti-bacterial, anti-viral or anti-yeast. You could try using half the usual amount of washing detergent.

#### Washing your vulva

- Your vulva does not need scrubbing or washing with soap. Too much washing can make the symptoms worse, so you should clean the vulval area once a day only.
- If possible, have a shower rather than a bath. Wash with your hands and water only and avoid using sponges or flannels to wash the vulva as these can irritate the skin. To dry, pat the area with a soft towel or use a hair dryer on low setting.
- If you choose to use a washing product, then use a soap-free product such as aqueous cream without SLS (a special type of moisturiser available without prescription from your pharmacy or on prescription from your doctor). Do not use baby wipes or wet wipes.
- When washing your hair, take care that shampoo does not come into contact with the vulval area.

#### Toileting

- If you find passing urine makes your symptoms worse, then wash the urine away from the vulval area using sports cap or squirt bottle while you are on the toilet.
- Treat and manage constipation.
- You may need to try different brands of toilet paper.

## Pubic hair care

- Avoid shaving, hair removal creams and waxing the vulval area. These increase the risk of irritation and skin infections.
- You can trim closely with clippers instead.
- Laser hair removal may suit some people.

## Reminder of what to avoid

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- Avoid wearing panty liners/pads as much as possible.
- Avoid close fitting clothes and synthetic fibres.
- Avoid baby wipes and toilet wipes, even unscented ones. You may wet toilet paper slightly with water.
- Avoid using soap, bubble bath, bath bombs deodorants and other “feminine” products on vulval skin.
- Avoid tea tree, aloe vera and paw-paw based products.
- Avoid shaving.

## Other things to think about

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- You may like to apply an emollient daily to moisturise the skin for example Vaseline or emulsifying ointment. You may need to try different types to find one that is the most helpful. Applying prior to going to the toilet can also help reduce stinging from contact with urine. You may need to keep a small pot with you to reapply during the day.
- Using tampons, a menstrual cup, washable pads or period underwear rather than disposable pads if possible.
- You may need to see a pelvic physiotherapist to help with bladder leakage.
- Vaginal oestrogen or vaginal moisturisers may be helpful for menopausal women.
- If using a lubricant for sex it may contain irritating chemicals. Please ask your doctor for advice on suitable lubricants. Avoid food-based lubricants such as coconut oil.

## Further information

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More advice and information on specific conditions can be found on the following website

Australian and New Zealand Vulvovaginal Society website [www.anzvs.org](http://www.anzvs.org)

We may also provide you with a condition specific information leaflet or direct you to other sources. Please ask your doctor if you need more information.

For more information about:

hospital and specialist services, go to [www.cdhb.health.nz](http://www.cdhb.health.nz) | your health and medication, go to [www.healthinfo.org.nz](http://www.healthinfo.org.nz)