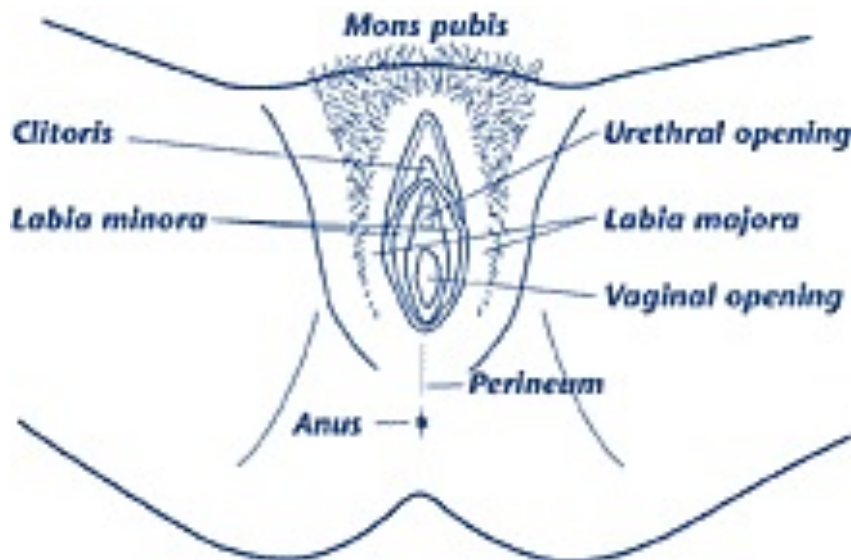


Patient Information Leaflet

General Care of the Vulva

What is the Vulva?

The vulva is the female external genital organ. It is the area bounded by a fatty pad covered by hair (the mons), the groins and the back passage (anus). It has outer lips (labia) that cover the clitoris, the inner lips, and the vaginal opening. The tissue around the vaginal opening is called the vestibule.



What Can I Do to Improve the General Condition of the Vulva?

Most women with a vulval disorder will benefit from advice on general care of vulval skin and avoiding potential irritants.

- Washing with water only causes dry skin and makes itching worse. Use a soap substitute to clean the vulval area. Use a small amount of the cream or ointment with water to wash your skin. This will stop the skin from getting as dry and irritated as it would if you used soap or water alone. The cream/ointment is safe to use frequently.
- Shower rather than bath and clean the vulval area only once a day. Over-cleaning can aggravate vulval symptoms.
- If you use a bath, it is helpful to add a bath emollient.
- Avoid using sponges or flannels to wash the vulva. These can irritate your skin. Instead, wash your vulva using aqueous cream or another soap substitute with just your hand. Gently dab the vulval area dry with a soft towel or use a hairdryer on a cool setting held well away from the skin.
- Wear loose-fitting silk or cotton underwear. Close-fitting clothes such as tights, cycling shorts, leggings or tight jeans should be avoided.

- Wear loose-fitting trousers or skirts and replace tights with stockings. At home, you may find it more comfortable to wear long skirts without underwear.
- Sleep without underwear.
- Avoid fabric conditioners and biological washing powders. You may want to wash your underwear separately in a non-biological washing powder/gel.
- Avoid soaps, shower gel, scrubs, bubble baths, deodorants, baby wipes or douches in the vulval area.
- Some over-the-counter creams including baby or nappy creams, herbal creams (e.g. tea tree oil, aloe vera) and 'thrush' treatments may include possible irritants.
- Avoid wearing panty liners or sanitary towels on a regular basis.
- Avoid antiseptic (as a cream or added to bath water) in the vulval area.
- Wear white or light colours of underwear. Dark textile dyes (black, navy) may cause an allergy; if you wash new dark underwear a few times before wearing it, it will be less likely to cause a problem.
- Avoid coloured toilet paper.
- Avoid wearing nail varnish on finger nails if you tend to scratch your skin.

Use of emollients to protect your skin

- Emollients can be used as moisturisers throughout the day. These products can be bought in 500g tubs or in 100 g tubes over the counter or on prescription from your family doctor.
- Using one of these moisturisers every day can help relieve symptoms. Even when you do not have symptoms, using a moisturiser will protect the skin and can prevent flare-ups.
- It is important to find the moisturiser that suits you best. If the first one you try does not work well it is well worth trying another one.
- If your skin is irritated, aqueous cream can be kept in the fridge and dabbed on to cool and soothe the skin as often as you like.