

Information Leaflet
VIN
(Vulval Intraepithelial Neoplasia)

What is Vulval Intraepithelial Neoplasia?

Vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN) is **NOT** cancer. VIN is a disease of the vulval skin. It may also be associated with similar changes in cervix, vaginal, and anal skin. These changes may have been present in the past and you may have been treated for them. VIN may occur anywhere on the vulval skin and may occur at more than one site. The abnormal cells in VIN are only present in the skin surface. VIN is a pre-cancerous condition of the vulval skin which means that rarely a cancer can develop from these changes. VIN is more common in younger women aged 35 to 55 but may also occur in older women.

What causes VIN?

In younger women VIN is most commonly caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is an extremely common virus spread by skin-to-skin contact. Once contracted if HPV enters the skin and is not eradicated by the immune system then it may result in abnormal cells or VIN.

In older women VIN may be associated with other vulval skin conditions such as lichen sclerosus and lichen planus. These conditions are usually also associated with symptoms such as itching and pain.

VIN is not caused by lack of cleanliness.

VIN is more common in women with reduced immunity (e.g. kidney transplant, HIV, steroid use).

Most women with VIN do not have any other medical complaints.

What are the symptoms of VIN?

VIN may have no symptoms at all. Alternately the vulva may itch, feel painful (burning) or swollen. VIN may be associated with pain during sex. VIN may occur anywhere on the vulva and may occur in multiple sites as flat or raised areas of skin, which may have a rough surface. The lesions may be brown, white, grey, or red in colour.

How is VIN Diagnosed?

Your doctor will carefully examine you. If VIN is suspected then the only way to be certain is to perform a small biopsy (remove a small sample of skin). This sample can often be taken in clinic under local anaesthetic. The skin sample is sent to the laboratory and examined under a microscope. The results of the skin sample should be ready within 2 weeks. If VIN is suspected then the cervix, vagina, and skin around the anus should also be examined, as VIN of the vulva is also associated with skin changes in this area. If a

cervical smear is due (or overdue) then this should be performed at the same time.

Can there be any complications of VIN?

In a small percentage of women the abnormal cells associated with VIN can go deeper than just the skin surface. This means that vulval cancer has developed. This process however may take many years to develop, as it is usually a very slow process of progression from VIN to cancer. The exact relationship between VIN and vulval cancer however remains unknown because so few studies have been done.

How is VIN treated?

The treatment of VIN depends upon the symptoms it is causing and the location on the vulva that is affected. Indeed if untreated VIN may improve, remain the same or become worse. In some cases simple observation may be sufficient although this means that regular follow-up is necessary.

The abnormal area of skin may also be removed with surgery. In cases where a small area is involved then it is sometimes possible to perform the surgery under local anaesthetic. With larger areas a general anaesthetic may be required.

The vulval skin may also be treated with locally applied creams instead of surgery. These creams try to eradicate the virus by improving the bodies own immune response at the site at which they are applied.

How often should I be seen?

VIN is a condition that may come back following treatment. It is therefore recommended that you are seen in clinic every 6 months to 12 months in clinic.

Where can I get further information?

We recommend that you use dedicated websites or help lines to gain further information on VIN as generic Internet searches can lead to you reading information that is not accurate or out of date.

VIN support group – http://groups.yahoo.com/group/VIN_support

Vulval Pain Society – <http://www.vulvalpainsociety.org/>

The vulval health awareness campaign -

<http://www.vhac.org/>

Tel. 07765947599

Macmillan –

<http://www.macmillan.org.uk>