

# General care of the vulva

**i** Information for patients  
Gynaecology



**PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

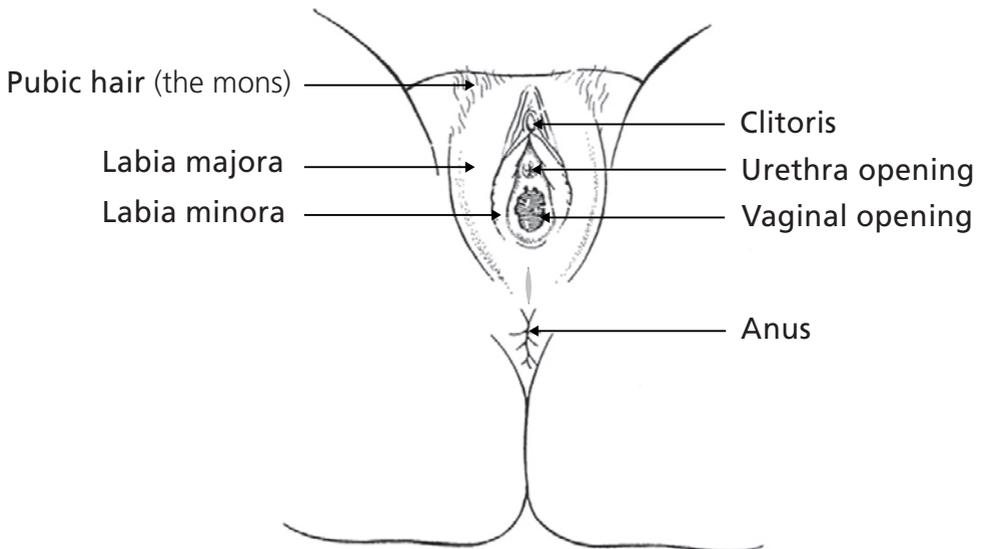
SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



We have written this information leaflet for women with a vulval disorder to offer advice on how to care for their vulval skin (protect delicate skin and avoid dryness) and avoid potential irritants.

## 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 two pairs of lips; the outer lips (labia majora) that cover the clitoris, and the inner lips (labia minora) where there are openings to the vagina and urethra (pass urine). The tissue around the vaginal opening is called the vestibule.



## General Care

### Personal Hygiene

- Washing with water only causes dry skin and makes itching worse. Use a small amount of soap substitute (cream or ointment) with water to wash your skin (vulval area). 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 make your symptoms worse).
- If you use a bath, it is helpful to add a bath emollient.
- Avoid using sponges or flannels to wash the vulva; as 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 (with caution) on a cool setting held well away from the skin and safely away from water/bathroom.
- Wear loose fitting silk or cotton underwear.
- Wear loose fitting clothing (trousers, skirts) and replace tights with stockings. At home, you may find it more comfortable to wear long skirts without underwear. Close-fitting clothes such as tights, cycling shorts, leggings or tight jeans should be avoided.
- 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 (cause irritation).

## Emollients

- Emollients can be used as moisturisers throughout the day and can be bought over the counter or on prescription from your GP.
- 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.

## Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you need any further information then do not hesitate to contact:

- Vulval Clinic Secretary: **0114 226 8300**



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