



Vulvodynia and Vestibulodynia

Vulvodynia means pain in your genital area (the vulva) when no other cause is found.

Vestibulodynia means pain around the opening to your vagina (the vestibule area is where the openings to your vagina and urethra are) when it is touched, or pressure is put on it.

What are the symptoms of vulvodynia and vestibulodynia?

Symptoms of vulvodynia include pain in your vulva and sometimes your buttocks and inner thighs. It is usually felt as burning, stinging or discomfort. The pain may be constant or come and go. Symptoms may happen in a small area or can involve your entire vulva.

Symptoms of vestibulodynia include pain that happens when the vestibule is touched. You may feel pain when urinating. The pain is not there all the time, but it can last for hours. It can stop you from having penetrative sex.

What causes these conditions?

The exact cause is not known. It might be caused by over-sensitive nerve endings in the area sending signals which are felt as pain. The condition may be triggered or made worse by:

- chronic skin conditions
- skin infections like candidiasis (thrush)
- laser treatment or surgery
- injury in the area
- childbirth
- skin irritation caused by soaps, detergents, douches, panty liners/pads and/or condoms
- emotions (e.g. stress or anxiety)
- tight clothing
- walking and sitting

How can these conditions be treated?

There are different treatments that may be useful. It may be worth trying several treatments to see which works best for you. Treatment can take time. Sometimes symptoms can settle by themselves, although it may take months or sometimes years to do so. The most successful treatments include:

- avoiding soaps, bubble baths, shower gels, shampoos and deodorants in your vulval area
- washing with a soap substitute like aqueous or sorbolene cream to keep your skin hydrated and reduce irritation



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- cool compresses
- salt-water baths
- avoiding tight, synthetic clothing and activities that irritate the area
- seeing a physiotherapist who specialises in pelvic health for advice about pelvic muscle relaxation training
- topical (creams or ointments) or oral medicines to reduce nerve pain.

Education and support about these conditions can help. You might like to try:

- talking about the problem openly with your partner and bringing them to appointments
- making sure you are comfortable before trying any penetrative sexual activity
- using water-based lubricant before sex or putting in a tampon
- having a warm, relaxing bath when you feel the pain
- seeing a sex therapist or counsellor to talk about:
 - the emotional impacts of this diagnosis
 - ways to enjoy intimacy without vaginal penetration.

If you need more information or have any questions, please contact the Canberra Sexual Health Clinic on (02) 5124 2184.

References:

The British Association of Dermatologists (2015) Vulvodynia and vestibulodynia patient information leaflet.
<http://www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets>

DermNetNZ (2010) Vestibulodynia. <https://www.bad.org.uk/patient-information-leaflets/vulvodynia/>

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