

# Vulvar Pain

## Key Information for Patients

---

### What is Vulvodynia?

The vulva is the outside part of the genitals that you can see and touch. It includes the labia, the clitoris, the urethral opening, and the opening of the vagina. The vagina is different. It is the internal canal inside the body.<sup>1</sup>

Vulvodynia means ongoing pain or discomfort of the vulva that lasts at least 3 months and has no clear cause found by a clinician.<sup>2</sup>

The pain can affect the whole vulva or only certain spots, for example the clitoris or the area just inside the vaginal opening called the vestibule.<sup>2</sup>

Pain may happen only when the area is touched, for example during sex or a pelvic exam, or it may happen on its own. About 16 percent of people have vulvar pain like this at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

It is important that all causes of vulvar pain are ruled out including but not limited to benign and malignant skin conditions, hormonal atrophy (due to menopause, postpartum or hormonal contraception), and nerve conditions such as pudendal neuralgia.<sup>2</sup>

### What are the symptoms?

Individuals experience uncomfortable sensations such as burning, stinging, irritation, stabbing, or rawness. The discomfort may be mild or severe. Some people find the symptoms very distressing and report that the symptoms interfere with daily living activities (wearing clothes, sitting, or walking) and/or sexual activities.<sup>3</sup>

### How is vulvodynia diagnosed?

Your clinician will start with a careful conversation about your symptoms and health history, then do a gentle exam of the vulva and vagina.<sup>4</sup>

Most people do not need special tests. Before diagnosing vulvodynia, your clinician will first rule out other causes such as skin conditions, hormonal changes after menopause or childbirth, etc.<sup>4</sup>

### How is vulvodynia treated?

There is no single treatment that works for everyone. Options can include medicines, behavior-based approaches, pelvic care strategies, and in some cases surgery. Many people need to try more than one option to find relief.<sup>5</sup>

If you have had pain for a long time, a team approach with different types of care can help. There is no single treatment that works for everyone.

The National Vulvodynia Association has a Self Help Guide which you can access here - [\*\*Vulvodynia: A Self- Help Guide\*\*](#).



**SHAPE**

Sexual Health & Genito-Pelvic Pain  
Knowledge Empowerment Hub

**BC CENTRE**  
FOR *Vulvar Health*

## Self-help resources

These videos explain what we know about causes, how vulvodynia can affect sex and relationships, and patient experiences.

\*This guide does not replace medical advice. If you have vulvar pain, book an appointment with your healthcare provider. Bring this handout to discuss the steps that are right for you.



### Symptoms

Burning, stinging, irritation, itching, rawness, or pain with sex



### Diagnosis

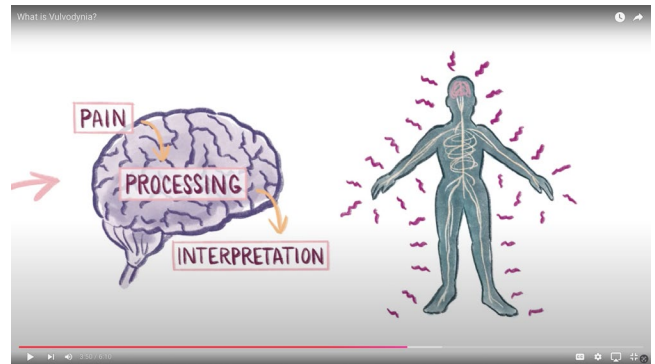
Careful history and exam, ruling out infections or skin conditions



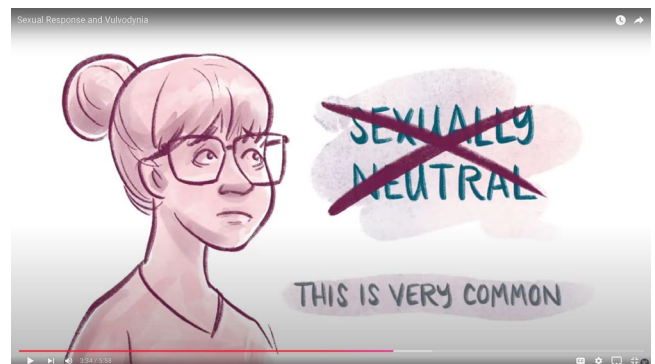
### Treatment

Individualized care, including pelvic floor therapy, counseling, and medication options

### 1. What is Vulvodynia?



### 2. Impact of vulvodynia on sexual health and relationships



### 3. Patients' lived experience of vulvodynia



**SHAPE**

Sexual Health & Genito-Pelvic Pain  
Knowledge Empowerment Hub

**BC CENTRE**  
FOR *Vulvar Health*

- 1 Vulvodynia Working Group. (n.d.). *What is vulvodynia*. In *The Vulvodynia Primary Care Toolkit*. BC Centre for Vulvar Health. <https://www.vulvodyniatoolkit.com/what-is-vulvodynia>
- 2 Bornstein, J., Goldstein, A. T., Stockdale, C. K., Bergeron, S., Pukall, C., Zolnoun, D., & Coady, D. (2016). 2015 ISSVD, ISSWSH, and IPPS Consensus Terminology and Classification of Persistent Vulvar Pain and Vulvodynia. *Journal of Lower Genital Tract Disease*, 20(2), 126–130. [https://www.nva.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015\\_ISSVD\\_ISSWSH\\_and\\_IPPS\\_Consensus\\_Terminology.2.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.nva.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015_ISSVD_ISSWSH_and_IPPS_Consensus_Terminology.2.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com) [https://www.nva.org/ISSVD\\_ISSWSH\\_and\\_IPPS\\_Consensus\\_Terminology](https://www.nva.org/ISSVD_ISSWSH_and_IPPS_Consensus_Terminology)
- 3 Vulvodynia Working Group. (n.d.). *Resources*. In *The Vulvodynia Primary Care Toolkit*. BC Centre for Vulvar Health. [https://www.vulvodyniatoolkit.com/resources?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.vulvodyniatoolkit.com/resources?utm_source=chatgpt.com) <https://www.vulvodyniatoolkit.com/resources>
- 4 Vulvodynia Working Group. (n.d.). *Making the diagnosis*. In *The Vulvodynia Primary Care Toolkit (Physical Exam module)*. <https://www.vulvodyniatoolkit.com/visits/the-physical-exam#diagnosis>
- 5 Vulvodynia Working Group. (2024). *Treatment plan essentials*. In *The Vulvodynia Primary Care Toolkit*. BC Centre for Vulvar Health. <https://www.vulvodyniatoolkit.com/visits/treatment-plan-essentials>



**SHAPE**

Sexual Health & Genito-Pelvic Pain  
Knowledge Empowerment Hub

**BC CENTRE**  
FOR *Vulvar Health*