

Vulvar Pain

Key Information for Patients

What is vulvar pain?

Vulvar pain is a generalized term for persistent pain or discomfort of the vulva (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.

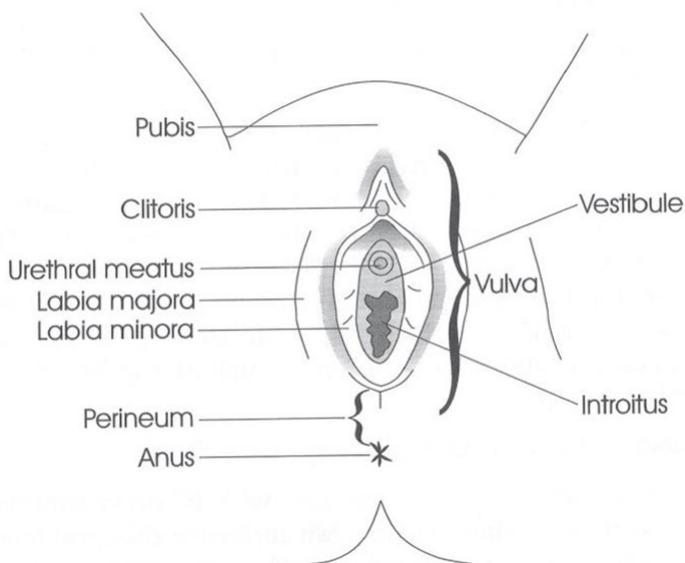


Figure 1. Vulvar Anatomy.
Adapted from A Self-Help Guide by the National Vulvodynia Association (2016).

Vulvar Pain is NOT Normal

Types of vulvar pain

Vulvar pain can be specified in two broad categories:

- **Vulvar pain caused by a specific disorder**
- **Vulvodynia:** vulvar pain lasting 3 months or more without a clear identifiable cause, but possibly associated with contributing factors.¹

People with vulvas who experience vulvar pain may have both a specific disorder and vulvodynia.¹

Potential causes of vulvar pain

- Infection (e.g., yeast, bacterial vaginosis)
- Inflammation (e.g., lichen sclerosis)
- Neoplasia (e.g., tumours)
- Neurologic (nerve damage)
- Trauma (e.g., genital mutilation)
- Iatrogenic (e.g., side effects of medical treatments such as chemotherapy)
- Hormonal deficiency (e.g., genitourinary syndrome of menopause)
- Sometimes pain may be unexplained



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What is vulvodynia?

Vulvodynia is vulvar pain or discomfort that lasts at least 3 months without a clear identifiable cause, but can have potential associated factors.¹

What are the symptoms?

Patients have described feelings of:

- Stinging
- Burning
- Stabbing
- Rawness
- Throbbing
- Tearing
- Tightness

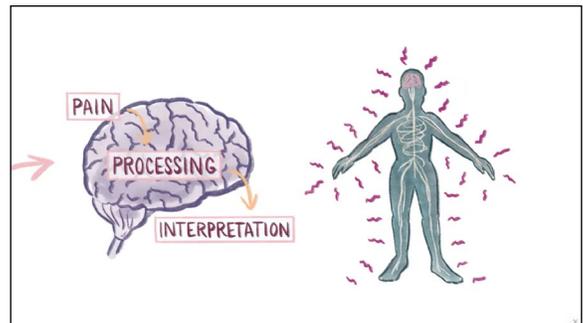
Approximately 16% of people with vulvas will experience vulvodynia at some point in their lives.³

How is vulvodynia classified?

- **Location:** localized, generalized or mixed
- **Type:** Provoked, spontaneous or mixed
- **Onset:** Primary or secondary
- **Temporal patterns:** intermittent, constant, immediate or delayed.

It is important to be assessed by a physician for a clarify diagnosis with medical history and genital exam.

Resource



Watch: ["What is Vulvodynia?"](#)

- 1 Bornstein, J., Goldstein, A. T., Stockdale, C. K., Bergeron, S., Pukall, C., Zolnoun, D., Coady, D., & Consensus Vulvar Pain Terminology Committee of the International Society for the Study of Vulvovaginal Disease (ISSVD), the International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health (ISSWSH), and the International Pelvic Pain Society (IPPS). (2016). 2015 ISSVD, ISSWSH, and IPPS consensus terminology and classification of persistent vulvar pain and vulvodynia. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 127(4), 745-751. <https://doi.org/10.1097/AOG.0000000000001359>
- 2 Moldwin, R. (2000). *Vulvar anatomy [Diagram]*. National Vulvodynia Association. <https://www.nva.org/what-is-vulvodynia/vulvar-anatomy/>
- 3 Harlow, B. L., & Stewart, E. G. (2005). Adult-onset vulvodynia in relation to childhood violence victimization. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 161(9), 871-880. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwi108>
- 4 Pukall, C. F., Goldstein, A. T., Bergeron, S., Foster, D., Stein, A., Kellogg-Spadt, S., & Bachmann, G. (2016). Vulvodynia: Definition, prevalence, impact, and pathophysiological factors. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 13(3), 291-304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2015.12.021>



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