

# Vulval and vaginal health

It is important to look after your vulva and vagina (female private parts). Conditions that affect this area are common and easy to treat, but you can talk to your doctor if you are worried.

## What is the difference between your vulva and vagina?

Some people think the vulva is the vagina, but they are different. Your vulva is the part you can see. It includes your inner and outer labia, clitoris, urethral opening (where wee comes out) and vaginal opening. Your vagina is the part inside your body that you can't see. It's where you put your tampon.



## What can affect this area?

### Irritation

The skin on your vulva is very delicate, so many things can cause irritation.

Vulval irritation can be uncomfortable.

Symptoms can include:

- burning or itching
- the feeling of crawling under your skin
- redness or swelling
- skin cracking or splitting
- skin whitening
- pain during sex.

### Discharge

All women have vaginal discharge and fluids that keep the vulva and vagina moist and healthy, but sometimes discharge is caused by an infection.

### Infection

There are different infections that can affect the vulva and vagina, for example, thrush. Thrush is a common infection, caused by candida, that affects around 75% of women at least once during their lifetime.

A vaginal infection can cause symptoms such as:

- burning or itching around the vulva
- vaginal discharge that is smelly or a different colour to normal
- pain during sex
- a stinging feeling when weeing
- swelling or redness of the vulva and vagina
- splits in the skin of the vulva.

## Allergies and skin conditions

Some products can cause an allergic reaction, leading to irritation around the vulva. For example, tampons, soaps, tight synthetic pants (Lycra) and chlorine (from swimming pools). There are other skin conditions that can affect the vulva.

## Ageing

Around the time of menopause, your vulval and vaginal skin may get thinner, leading to dryness, irritation and pain during sex.

## Vulval and vaginal pain

Vulval and vaginal pain can be caused by different things. For example, infections, skin conditions, pelvic floor muscle tightness, nerve damage and tissue damage from surgery or childbirth.

## When to see your doctor

It's important to see your doctor if you are worried about vulval irritation, discharge or pain.

Your doctor might do an examination, swab or other tests to find out what is causing the problem. Depending on the cause, they might give you ointments or creams, tablets or information about how to look after this area. In some cases, they might refer you to a specialist.

You can learn more about how to care for your vulva by reading our booklet:

[The Vulva](#) (available in English only).

For more information, visit [jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/vulva-vagina-ovaries-uterus](https://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/vulva-vagina-ovaries-uterus)

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. This fact sheet generally uses the terms 'women' and 'girls'. These terms are intended to include women with diverse sexualities, intersex women and women with a transgender experience.

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