

## Care of vulval skin irritation

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### What is the vulva?

The vulva is the area surrounding the opening of the vagina. It includes the labia (the inner and outer vaginal lips) and the clitoris.

### What are the symptoms of vulval skin irritation?

Symptoms include itching, pain, soreness and redness. Many women have symptoms that can occur at any age.

### Can the menopause cause vulval irritation?

Yes. Because of lower oestrogen levels, the vulval skin tends to become thinner and drier during and after the menopause; this can make it prone to itch. The low oestrogen levels can also cause vaginal dryness.

Low oestrogen levels can also start before the actual menopause when you are still having periods.

### Do I need to seek medical advice?

Vulval irritation is a symptom, not a condition in itself. It can be caused by many different conditions. Therefore, if you have a persistent itchy vulva, you should seek medical advice to identify the cause.

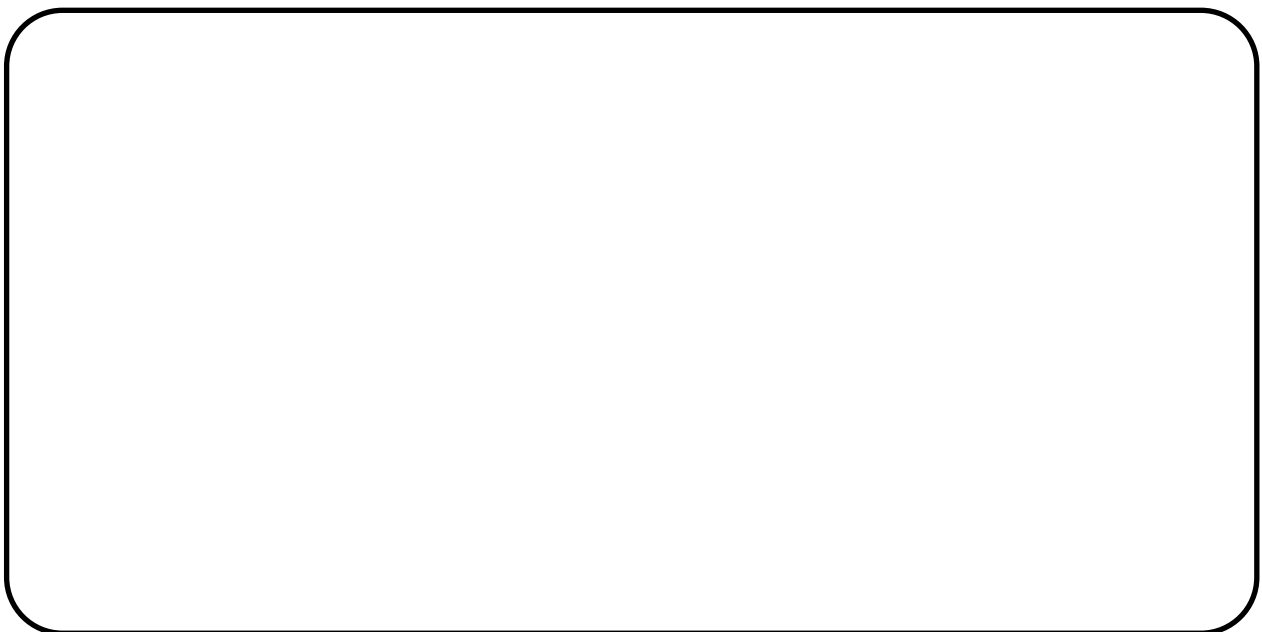
### General measures for care of vulval irritation

Try and make this part of your daily routine:

- Use a soap substitute and avoid skin contact with soaps, bubble baths and shower gels. The doctor or nurse will recommend some soap substitutes (see 'Current suggested treatment' box below).
- Use a non-biological washing powder and avoid fabric conditioners.
- Avoid using panty liners.
- Wear cotton, non-dyed underwear.

- Drink plenty of water and avoid caffeine.
- Use a regular barrier cream, such as Vaseline, as often as needed.
- Use an oil-based lubricant for penetrative sex. If this is a particular problem, please discuss this further with the doctor or nurse specialist.
- Avoid waxing or shaving. Try clipping hair instead if needed.
- Try not to wear close-fitting clothes at night and also avoid tight trousers/tights when able, especially when at home.
- If you have problems with incontinence, this can make the skin more uncomfortable. This is a very common problem. Please discuss this with us in clinic or with your GP.

## Current suggested treatment for you



## Reference

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, (2013). *Skin Conditions of the Vulva*. Available at [www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/skin-conditions-of-the-vulva/](http://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/skin-conditions-of-the-vulva/)

### **PALS**

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'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust  
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple  
Devon EX31 4JB  
Tel. 01271 322577  
[www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk](http://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk)

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Tel: 01271 313970 / email: [ndht.contactus@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.contactus@nhs.net)