

Vulvitis

What is vulvitis?

Vulvitis is swelling and irritation (inflammation) of the vulva. The vulva are the folds of skin around the opening of the vagina (birth canal) and urethra (the tube that drains urine from the bladder).

What is the cause?

Vulvitis can happen to a woman at any age. Possible causes are:

- Skin problems such as eczema, seborrhea, psoriasis, or chronic dermatitis
- Allergies or irritation from chemicals, such as spermicides, soaps, bubble bath, or other perfumed products
- Infection by scabies, mites, lice, yeast, bacteria, or a virus, such as herpes
- Vulvar dystrophy, which is a change in the skin of the vulva

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Redness, burning, itching, and stinging
- Soreness
- Thickening or small cracks in the skin around the vagina
- Changes in vaginal discharge

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Tests may include:

- Pelvic exam
- A biopsy, which is the removal of a small sample of tissue for testing

How is it treated?

The treatment for vulvitis depends on the cause. If an infection is the cause, it may be treated with medicine put on your vulva or into your vagina. Or it may be treated with shots or pills. To prevent reinfection or spread of infection, your partner may need to be treated also.

If vulvitis is being caused by a product that is irritating the vulva, it will usually go away when you stop using the product. Some irritations are treated with steroid or hormone creams.

Your healthcare provider may advise you to stop having sex until the vulvitis heals.

Depending on the cause of the vulvitis, it may heal in a few days with treatment or it may take a few weeks to go away. In some cases vulvitis can be a long-term condition and not go away, even with treatment.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. Keep using the medicine for as long as your provider tells you to.

Other things you can do to help relieve symptoms are:

- Avoid irritating your vulva. For example, don't use strong or perfumed soaps, lotions, or deodorants in your genital area. Bathe with a gentle, unscented soap. Rinse your genital area thoroughly but gently. Pat dry without rubbing.
- If you have sores in the genital area, your symptoms may be soothed by soaking in a bath with aluminum acetate solution (Burrow's solution) added to it. Or soak a cloth in Burrow's solution and put the moist cloth on the sore area.
- Wear loose-fitting, all-cotton or cotton-crotch underwear.
- Keep your genital area dry.
- Don't use feminine hygiene products, such as sprays or powders. Avoid bubble baths and oils. Don't douche unless told to do so by your healthcare provider.
- Don't use perfumed laundry detergent or fabric softener.
- Don't use tampons.
- Use unscented white toilet paper.

Ask your healthcare provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

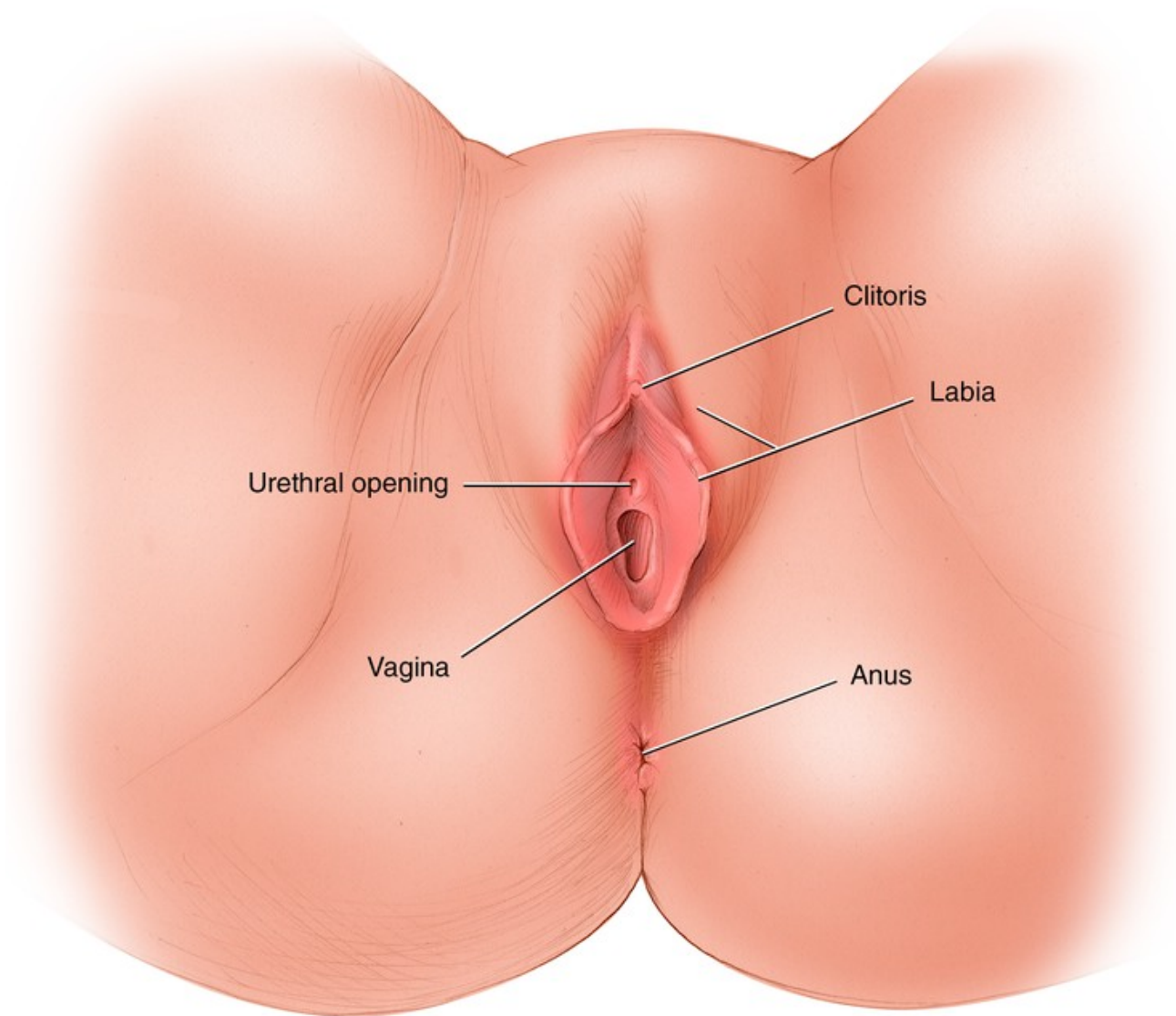
How can I help prevent vulvitis?

- If you tend to get yeast infections when you take antibiotics, ask your provider about using an antifungal cream when you are taking antibiotic medicine.
- Have just 1 sexual partner who is not sexually active with anyone else. Use a condom when you have sex to lower your risk for infection. Avoid spermicidal foams, gels, and creams if you have had a problem with them before.

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