

# Vestibulitis

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## What is vestibulitis?

Vestibulitis is a condition characterized by pain and irritation of the area just outside of the vaginal entrance (vestibule). It is a life-long (chronic) condition that can improve with treatment, but can get worse at times.

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## What are the symptoms?

The main symptom is pain.

Some people describe feeling swollen, while others have burning, piercing or stabbing pain. Rarely, people with vestibulitis have the frequent urge to go pee (urinary frequency).

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## How severe is the pain?

Pain level can range from mild to severe. For most people, the pain comes and goes. For others, it can be daily and make it difficult to sit or walk.

For some people, pain gets worse when touching the area. Some people have pain with placing tampons or with penetration during sex.

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## How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will use a “touch test” to see if you have vestibulitis. During this test, the doctor will test the sensitivity of the tiny gland openings at the entrance of your vagina to light touch with a cotton-tipped applicator. Your doctor will also look for any red spots in this area. About 2 out of every 3 people also have visible red spots around the opening of the vagina.

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## Is it sexually transmitted?

No. There is no evidence that vestibulitis is passed from person to person by having sex. People who are not sexually active can have this condition.

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## What are the causes?

The exact cause is unknown. Some doctors think it may be connected to:

- Excess moisture in the area outside the vagina (vulvar area)
  - Vaginal and vulvar yeast infections
  - An allergic reaction to an environmental irritant
  - An autoimmune inflammatory response
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## When should I call the doctor?

Please call us at 206-987-2028 option 4, if:

- Your pain is getting worse
  - You have any questions
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### To Learn More

- Adolescent Medicine  
206-987-2028
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

### How is it treated?

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#### Topical steroids

Topical steroid ointments that you rub on the affected skin may help to lessen irritation and redness. It may be necessary to use the ointment for several months before seeing an improvement.

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#### Anti-depressant medicines

These medicines may help by interrupting the severity of the body's nerve response. Some people with chronic pain experience depression and this may help.

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#### Lidocaine jelly

Lidocaine jelly can temporarily numb a painful area to make an activity more comfortable (sitting for a long period or having sex). If you use this treatment, use a cotton-swab or gloves to apply the jelly or wash your fingers right after you apply it. This is to avoid your fingers feeling numb.

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### Other treatments

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#### Baths or ice

Soaking in warm baths with plain water, epsom salts or oatmeal can be soothing. Ice packs may also decrease pain.

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#### Biofeedback

Biofeedback helps you learn to control your body's response to pain. This treatment can help people with instability or spasms of their pelvic floor.

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#### Pelvic floor physical therapy

When it is painful to touch the vaginal entrance, a natural reflex is to tighten the pelvic floor muscles. This tightening can make it harder to use tampons or have sex. Pelvic floor physical therapy can help you learn to tighten and relax these muscles.

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#### Counselling

Learning to reduce stress can help decrease pain and improve coping skills.

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### What else can I do?

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#### Treat yeast infections early

Vaginal yeast infections can make pain worse. If you have a yeast infection, get treatment right away. If yeast infections keep coming back, you may need treatment to prevent yeast infections.

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#### Breathable clothing

Wear cotton underwear and loose clothing. If you normally wear pantyhose or tights, try cutting out the crotch area or switch to stockings. When you do not have your period, sleep without underwear to air out the area.

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#### Toilet paper

Use white, softer, non-perfumed toilet paper.

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### Laundry detergents

Laundry detergent can cause the clothes you wear to be an irritant. You may want to try using a different detergent, such as:

- Dreft
- Baking soda soap
- Other products advertised as dye and fragrance free or hypoallergenic

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### Bathing or showering

Avoid getting any soap on your vaginal area when bathing or showering. When showering, lean forward to rinse out your hair so the shampoo does not run into your vulvar area. If you take a bath and there is soap residue in the bath water, rinse your vulvar area with clean water before you get out. After drying off, use a blow dryer on low heat to dry the area extra well.

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### Vaginal lubricants

The following can be used for vaginal lubrication. However, most oils cannot be used with condoms. Tracking your symptoms may help you choose the product that works best for you.

- Pure coconut oil
- Vegetable oil
- Astro-Glide or K-Y jelly (OK to be used with condoms)

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### Contraceptive devices

Some contraceptive devices (such as latex condoms) and creams can irritate the vulva. For people with a latex allergy, non-latex condoms are an option. Talk with your provider to discuss your birth control options.

## Are there things I should avoid?

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### Products that cause irritation

Avoid products around the genital area that can cause irritation, such as:

- Perfumed soaps
- Oils (except the lubricants listed above during sex)
- Skin creams
- Lanolin
- Bubble baths or bath oils
- Feminine deodorant sprays
- Perfumed menstrual pads

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### Staying in wet bathing suits or underwear

Staying in wet bathing suits or underwear can make vestibulitis worse. Water from swimming pools can be especially irritating. Before swimming, put Vaseline on the area. When you get out, use a spray bottle of water to rinse the area and dry the area using a blow dryer on low heat.