

# About Contact Vulvitis

Parkland Health & Hospital System Vulvology Clinic



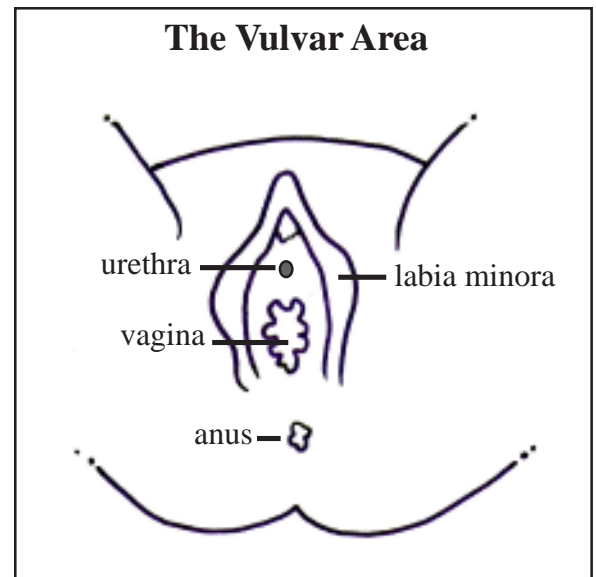
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## What is contact vulvitis?

Contact vulvitis is a skin problem in which there is itching and burning in the vulvar/vaginal area even though there is no infection.

This happens when the vulvar skin becomes very sensitive to products called contact irritants. Examples are things such as laundry soaps, fabric softeners, body soaps and feminine hygiene products (see the list on page 2). Using these products over a period of time causes irritation, burning and/or itching of your skin where the product has touched it.

Contact vulvitis is not usually an allergic reaction. Allergens are things that cause the allergic person to have trouble breathing or have a general skin reaction with rash, hives (itchy bumps) or blisters after only one or two times of touching or breathing the allergen.



## How will I know if I have contact vulvitis?

The vulvar skin may:

- Have a mild to very bad itching and/or burning feeling.
- Be red or swollen.
- Feel raw, because of the irritation.
- Feel damp. It may seem that the dampness is caused by a vaginal discharge. But it is caused by the irritation of the skin.
- Be painful. The pain may be felt while putting in a tampon, during a pelvic exam or during sex.

## How will my doctor or healthcare provider check for contact vulvitis?

Your doctor or healthcare provider will look for skin changes that may be found with contact vulvitis. Vaginal discharge will also be checked. Sometimes, a biopsy or small sample of skin may be needed.

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## What products may be causing the contact vulvitis?

- Bath soaps, gel, lotions
- Douches
- Feminine hygiene sprays, perfumes or powders
- Colored, perfumed toilet paper
- Adult and baby wipes or towelettes
- Deodorant tampons and pads
- Non-deodorant pads
- Birth control creams, jellies, foams and sponges
- Condoms, prepackaged with lubricant or spermicides
- Fabric softeners and dryer sheets
- Laundry soap with enzymes, whiteners (bleach), brighteners, dyes or scents
- Non-cotton (synthetic) clothing such as Nylon underwear or pantyhose

## How should contact vulvitis be treated?

1. **Vulvar skin care.** Only use products that do not irritate the skin of the vulvar area. Keep the vulvar skin as clean and dry as possible. Follow the instructions on the Vulvar Skin Care handout.
2. **Steroid ointment.** Put a thin layer of steroid ointment over the vulvar area. This will lessen redness, swelling, itching and burning. Use only as your doctor or healthcare provider tell you to. Using too much or too often can make the problem worse.
3. **Baking soda soaks.** Soak in warm (not hot) bath water with 4 - 5 tablespoons of baking soda. This will help soothe the vulvar itching and burning. Soak for 10 - 15 minutes at a time, 2 or 3 times a day. If you are using a sitz bath, use just 1 - 2 teaspoons of baking soda.
4. **Drying powder.** You can put Gold Bond or Zeosorb powder on the vulvar area if dampness or moisture is a problem.

Your symptoms should clear up with this treatment. If they do not clear up, you may need more treatment. Tell your doctor or healthcare provider at your next follow-up visit.