



Authoritative facts about the skin from the [New Zealand Dermatological Society Incorporated](#).

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## Pruritus vulvae (itchy vulva)

Pruritus vulvae is the term given to itching affecting the genital area of women. It should be distinguished from [vulvodynia](#), which refers to chronic burning symptoms.

Pruritus vulvae is quite common and can result in a lot of distress. People who suffer from it have often done so for many years, and may only receive temporary relief from treatment.

There are a number of causes of pruritus vulvae. These include:

- A skin condition such as [dermatitis](#), [lichen simplex](#), [psoriasis](#) or [lichen sclerosus](#).
- Microorganisms such as candida ([thrush](#)), lactobacilli ([cytolytic vaginosis](#)), gardnerella, or trichomoniasis.
- [Irritant contact dermatitis](#) due to scratching, friction, occlusive underwear, soap or inappropriate applications.
- A skin cancer such as [vulvar intraepithelial neoplasia](#), [extramammary Paget disease](#) or rarely, invasive [vulvar cancer](#).

Often several of these factors are present, and it can be difficult to determine the exact cause of the itch and/or rash. The doctor will need to examine the affected area and to take swabs for microbiological examination. Other areas of the skin will be examined to determine the likelihood of a more widespread skin disorder being the cause.

Sometimes, a [skin biopsy](#) is necessary to determine the exact nature of the skin condition.

[Patch tests](#) are sometimes performed to see whether any [contact allergy](#) is present such as to a fragrance, medicament or other material.

### Treatment

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There are some general principles for all cases:

- Keep cool, especially at night time
- Wear loose fitting underwear and outer clothing
- Avoid nylon pantihose
- Wash once or twice daily with lukewarm water alone or use a [soap-free cleanser](#) instead of conventional soap
- Avoid scratching or rubbing the affected area – a single scratch keeps the itching going for a week
- Avoid riding bicycles or horses
- Insert tampons with care, and change sanitary pads frequently
- Do not apply strong steroid creams for more than a few days.

Unfortunately, allergic reactions occur quite readily when inflamed skin affects the genital area. So, avoid the temptation to try every cream in the chemist's shop.

If your specific prescribed medications do not seem helpful, aqueous cream, petrolatum, or another simple emollient can be used. [Hydrocortisone](#) cream is generally safe, but if it seems to irritate, discontinue its use and seek advice from your doctor.

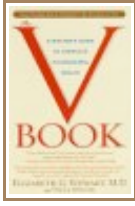
Some patients with severe itching are helped by oral [antihistamines](#) or sedative tricyclic antidepressant medications, such as [amitriptyline](#) or serotonin reuptake agents, taken at night.

## Related information

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### Self-help books:

[The V Book: A Doctor's Guide to Complete Vulvovaginal Health](#)



### On DermNet NZ:

- [Genital skin problems](#)
- [Vulval/vaginal problems in prepubertal females](#)
- [Skin problems related to menopause](#)
- [Vulvodynia](#)

### Other websites:

- [Enfermedad del Vulva y Vagina.](#) - Spanish language information from Argentina

DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.

If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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