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**Get to know
your Vulva**

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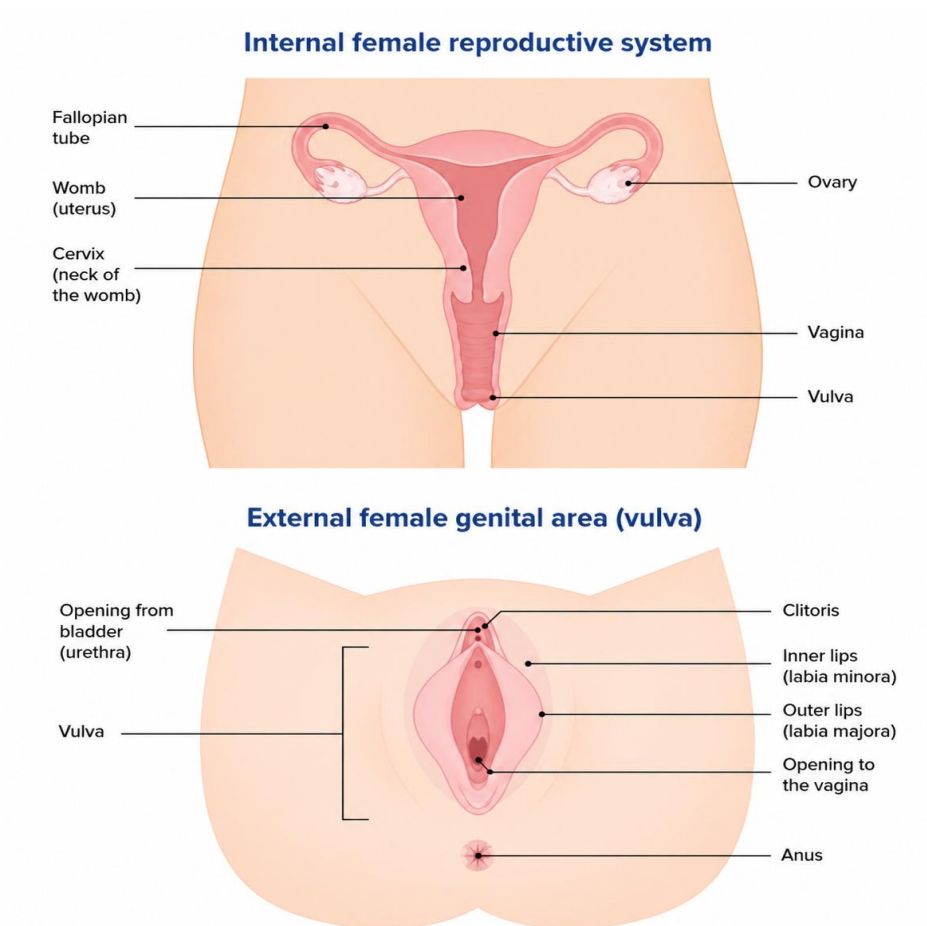
Patient information

Get to know your vulva: Mapping skin care techniques dilator therapy



Excellent patient care, together

Vulva anatomy



Vagina

The vagina is part of the internal female reproductive organ that connects the uterus with the outside of the vagina, the vulva, via the cervix. The vagina plays a vital role in reproduction, birth, and sex.

The vagina is a 'funnel-shaped' organ. It is muscular and stretchy with ridged walls that join to create a tube-like structure. These walls facilitate the secretion of vaginal fluids, contain nerve endings for sexual pleasure, and have receptors for oestrogen. Oestrogen is key for maintaining a healthy vaginal lining and supporting the healthy bacteria that keep your vagina at a slightly acidic pH level.

Vulva

The area we can see on the outside of the vagina is called the vulva. It forms the first line of defence against germs entering the vagina.

Vulva Mapping



Attempt:

Stroke, touch, applying pressure

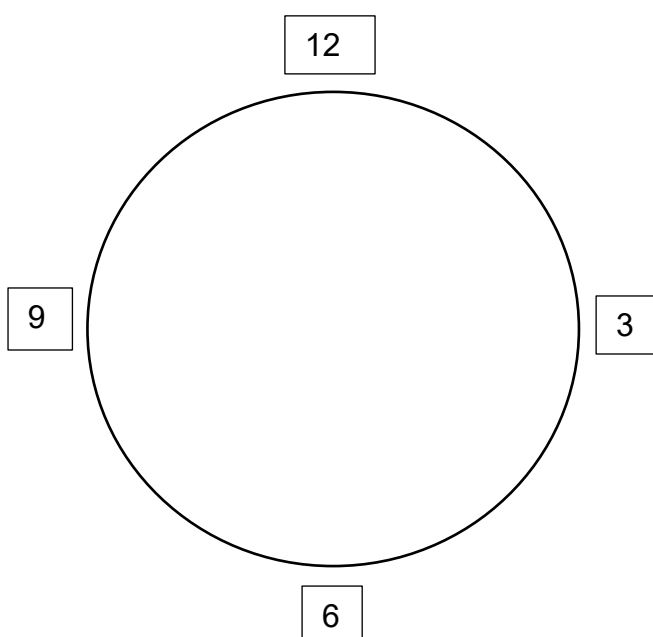
Start externally

Describe Skin quality or integrity:

Touch response:

If painful give a description and rate level of severity from 0 to 1 out of 10:

Internal- Vaginal entrance



Trace the circumference of vagina

Touch response:

Pressure response:

If painful give a description and rate level of severity from 0 to 1 out of 10:

Vulva Skin Care

It is encouraged to establish a vulva skin care routine.

Vulva skin is sensitive and requires hydration and moisturiser like other skin on our body. However, products need to be appropriate for genital skin.

Please avoid skin irritants like perfume or harsh medicated products. These can affect the vulva pH and skin barrier.

Please consult with your GP, Dermatologist or Pharmacist if unsure about a product.

Unscented emollient ointment, cream or lotion can soothe, protect and act as a barrier.

Topical oestrogen gel or cream may also be appropriate for you to use but you need to consult your GP or Consultant for prescription.

Oestrogen applied topically to the vulva skin can assist in replenishing skin integrity, protecting and improving the skin barrier.

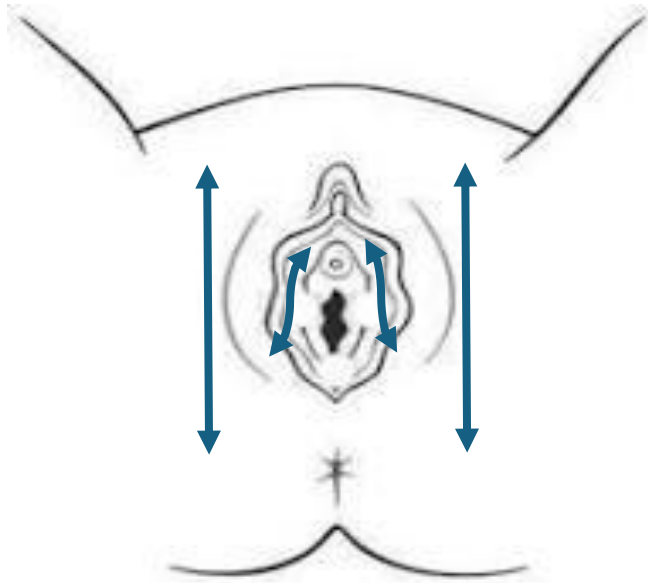
British association of Dermatology – Vulval skin care leaflet



How to Care for your Vulva skin

- Use non-fragranced emollients or emollient-based soap substitutes.
- Clean the skin with water gently using your hands only.
- Avoid cloths/sponges that can be abrasive or cause too much friction on the skin.
- Pat dry gently using a soft towel or air dry.
- The vaginal canal is self-cleaning; it does not require products or cleaning materials.
- Avoid washing too often - maximum once a day only. Washing more can aggravate dryness and cause irritation.
- Cotton underwear (100% cotton) is more breathable.
- Avoid synthetic materials or tight-fitting clothing.
- Vulva moisturising can be completed at night allowing product to be absorbed when you sleep.
- Avoid wearing panty liners or sanitary towels on a regular basis.
- Avoid fabric conditioners and biological washing powders.
- Some over the counter creams including baby or nappy creams, herbal creams (e.g. tea-tree oil, aloe vera) and thrush treatments may cause irritants.

External and Internal Techniques for vulva skin mobility



Global vulva skin stroke:

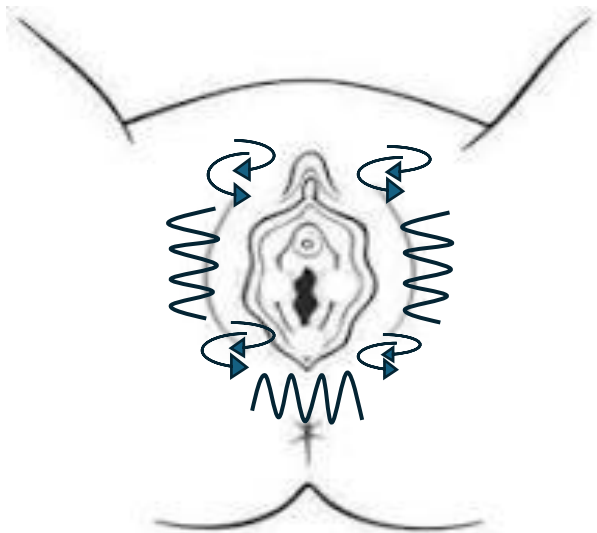
Pads of fingers to stroke vulva skin from pubic bone down to perineum and anus. Going down and up stroking gently to help skin normalise touch and mobilise.

Labia Frilling:

using index finger and thumb place either side of the labia. Gently mobilise the skin but not creating pain.

Mobilise:

Move vulva skin in circular or zig-zag motions with pads of fingers



Pressure:

Experiment with gentle pressures

Trace *outside* the vaginal entrance with pad of fingers.

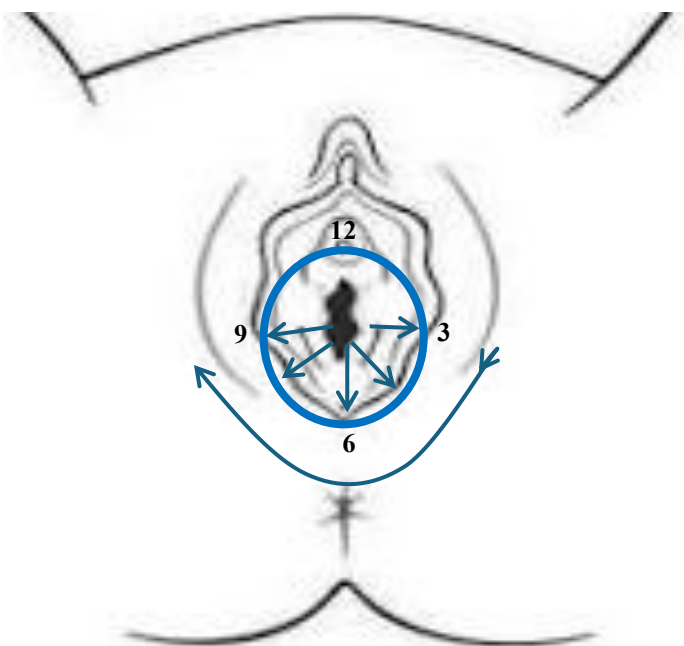
Trace *inside* vaginal entrance with finger moving from 12 o'clock although around to 12 o'clock again.

Hold and Release:

Insert finger into the vagina, apply gentle pressure at one location e.g. 6 o'clock. Use your deep breathing while you maintain the gentle pressure at the location for up to 10 seconds. Gently remove the pressure. Re-apply pressure again to same location, hold for up to 10 seconds and release. Repeat up to 5 times. "Stretching technique". Can repeated at all locations.

Swoop Technique:

Insert finger into the vagina, apply gentle pressure at 3 o'clock, keep the same pressure applied and move the finger from 3 o'clock around to 6 o'clock and over to 9 o'clock. Creating a swooping movement stretch.



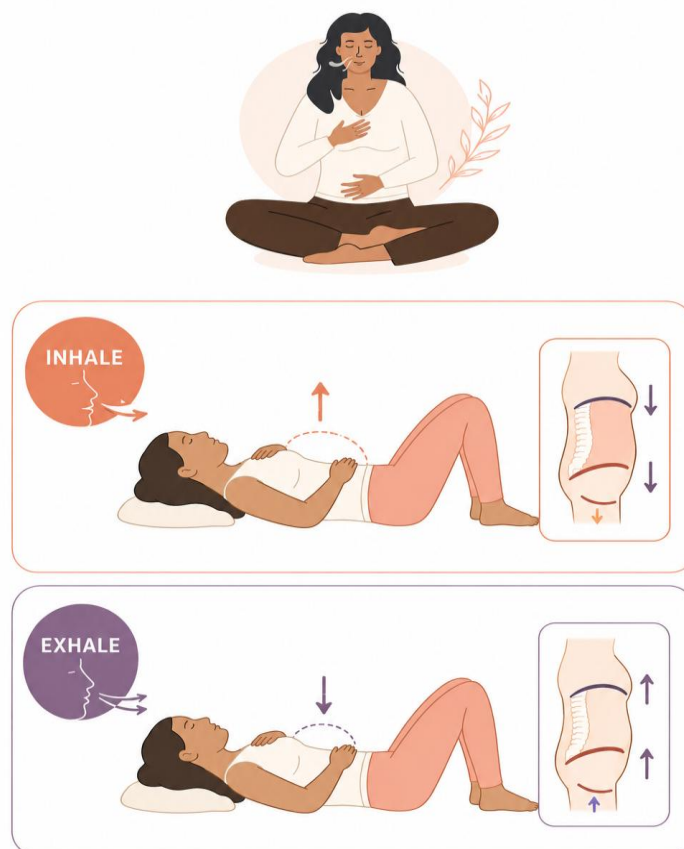
Pelvic Floor contract and release

Gently insert a finger into the vagina to where tension of muscles is felt. Keep the finger there but no discomfort or pain to be caused. Contract the pelvic floor muscles by closing your back passage. You will feel the muscles contract around your finger. Hold there for up to 5 to 10 seconds. Then 'let go' and let muscles relax. Gently insert the finger further into the vagina as able. You can repeat this technique multiple times.

Diaphragmatic breathing 'Belly Breathing'

We know that our breath is the only element of our sympathetic 'fight or flight' nervous system that we control. Breath also plays a role in pain relief and is free to use. Therefore, mastering the correct breath plays a crucial role in improving tension and pain. Physical contraction of the diaphragm during inhalation also causes the pelvic floor muscles to move downwards and lengthen. Studies have shown reduced stress hormones in individuals who regularly complete deep breathing exercises which reduces the activation of the bodies 'fight or flight' system.

Start by lying on your back with your knees bent or supported sitting that your back is supported. Do this in a quiet / relaxing space. Place your hands on your abdomen or one hand on chest and other hand on your abdomen. As you breath in, you're aiming for your hands on your abdomen to rise while your chest and shoulders remain still and relaxed – the abdomen inflates. As you breath out, your abdomen should relax back to resting position - the abdomen deflates.



Dilators

The goal is not to focus on getting the dilators in but to use them to provide feedback about your pelvic floor muscles. This helps you feel how much they are lengthening and stretching.

It is important to remember while using dilators not to push into pain.

Use dilators alongside internal techniques and breathing exercises.

Do not push into pain or psychological discomfort. If you are feeling anxious or upset, this will understandably impact how your muscles work and make dilator practice more challenging.



Using Dilators

- Lying in a comfortable position, position the first dilator with lubrication at your vaginal entrance. Slowly and gently insert dilator inside vagina.
- If this feels comfortable, gently insert the dilator further into the vagina.
- If you feel pain or pressure, then move the dilator back to a point that is comfortable.
- If you're met with 'muscle tension' or 'block' sensation, pause progression of dilator insertion and accompany it with your Diaphragmatic breathing or pelvic muscle contract and 'let go' techniques.
- You may need to repeat this throughout dilator insertion and complete in a phased approach.
- Like finger insertion above, you can rest the dilator over muscle tension points and use mobility and stretching techniques to reduce tension. (Pressure/stretching, hold and release and swooping techniques).
- As dilator becomes comfortable to insert, you may want to move to the next size dilator and begin the above techniques again.



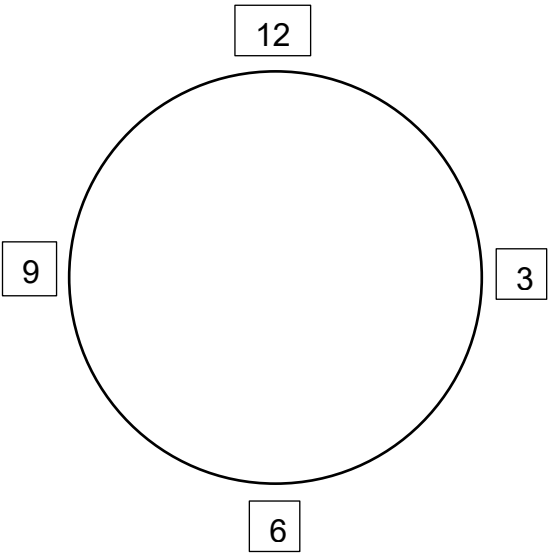
Apart from using dilators, vaginal dilation can be achieved by using vaginal massage, pelvic wand or by using sex toys such as a vibrator, or a combination of any of these.



Consistency is key. Small steps lead to big changes. Be kind to yourself.
If you have concerns or pain persists, speak to your healthcare professional.



Notes



Useful Resources

[Skin conditions of the vulva | RCOG](#)



[Postnatal perineal scar management](#)



[Skin & Your Wellbeing - BAD Patient Hub](#)



[The Vulval Pain Society](#)



[Resources — Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia](#)



[Sexual Function and Wellbeing Resources | BASHH](#)



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PALS

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