

VULVODYNIA: Patient Information

The term *vulvodynia* is derived from the words *vulva*—the visible parts of the female genitalia and *odynias*—pain. The pain of vulvodynia is not always accompanied by visible skin changes. Symptoms may include burning, dry, raw, or tight skin, and may range from mild to severe. Vulvodynia may have periods of activity (flare) and quiescence (remission). Pain may be induced by the following: external touch, sexual intercourse, tampons, tight pants, biking and horseback riding. Sometimes pain occurs in the absence of external pressure. The pain can sometimes be on the basis of irritated or inflamed nerves. At other times, the pain can be triggered by yeast overgrowth. The underlying cause of vulvodynia is uncertain, but theories suggest infection, allergic reaction, an autoimmune response, elevated levels of oxalate in the urine, pelvic floor muscle spasm, and nerve irritation as possible culprits. There are numerous treatments that may afford some degree of symptomatic relief. Medications including antihistamines (Vistaril), tricyclic antidepressants (Elavil), and anticonvulsants (Neurontin) may provide help. A program of pelvic floor muscle training to learn how to both strengthen and relax the pelvic muscles may help to relieve pelvic spasms. A low oxalate diet may provide relief by minimizing the irritating potential of oxalate present in the urine.

Self help tips:

- Wear only cotton underwear and loose clothing.
- During sex, avoid the use of lubricants that contain preservatives and chemicals.
- Use only unbleached, white toilet tissue and 100% cotton sanitary products.
- Avoid perfumed creams and soaps, bubble bath, bath oils, and feminine deodorant products.
- Use a bidet if possible.
- Place a compress of Aveeno (powdered oatmeal bath treatment) over the vulva three to four times daily. Put two tablespoons of Aveeno in one quart of water, mix in a jar and refrigerate. This is particularly helpful after intercourse or when a “flare” occurs.
- Don’t sit in a wet bathing suit.
- Avoid constipation.
- 5% Lidocaine (available by prescription) can be applied 10 minutes before sexual intercourse to make sex more comfortable.

For more help:

National Vulvodynia Association
P.O. Box 4491
Silver Springs, MD 20914-4491
Telephone: 301-299-0775
WWW.NVA.ORG

The National Vulvar Pain Foundation
WWW.VULVARPAIN.ORG

Andrew Siegel, M.D.
January 2014