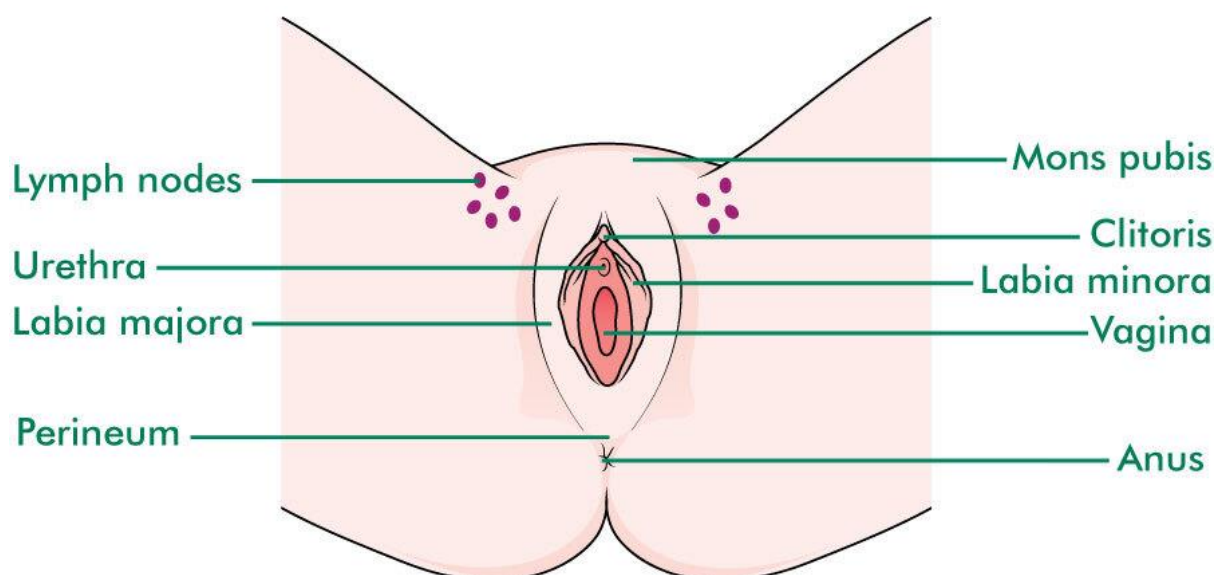


Patient information

Vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN)

What is the vulva?

The vulva is the external part of female genitalia. It includes the clitoris, the labia (also called the lips), the perineum, the urethra and the vaginal opening.



What is vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN)?

Vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN) describes change that can occur in the skin of the vulva. Abnormal cells develop in the surface layers of the vulval skin. VIN is not cancer. In some women it may disappear without treatment. In other women, if the changes are more severe, there is a chance that cancer could develop. This is why it is called a pre-cancerous condition.

What are the types of VIN?

VIN is divided into two main types.

- **Vulval intraepithelial neoplasia usual type (uVIN):** The most common type is usual type VIN (uVIN). This type is more prevalent in women aged 35 to 55. It is caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). Cell changes due to HPV infection are more likely to develop in women who smoke and in women with lowered immunity.
- **Vulval intraepithelial neoplasia differentiated type (dVIN):** This type is rarer. It is more common in women aged 55 to 85. It can often occur together with other skin conditions that can affect the vulva, such as lichen sclerosus or lichen planus. It is not usually associated with HPV.

Some very rare types of VIN do not fit into either of these categories. They are called unclassified type.

What does VIN feel like?

The symptoms of VIN vary between women. Some have no symptoms. Other women may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- itching
- pain
- changes to the vulval skin, such as thickened, raised, red or white patches of skin
- discomfort or pain during sex

If you feel or see anything that is not normal for you, then we always advise you to have a check up with your doctor or nurse.

Diagnosing VIN

If VIN is suspected the doctor will examine your vulva and may use a special microscope (a colposcope). This magnifies the area so that any changes can be clearly seen. They may also take a clinical photograph for your medical record.

They will then take a small sample of cells from the affected area (a biopsy). Before taking the biopsy, the doctor will numb the area using a local anaesthetic cream or injection. The results of the biopsy usually take 2 - 4 weeks and your specialist will contact you with this result.

Will I need any other tests?

Your doctor may also examine your cervix and vagina using a speculum to check for abnormal cells. This examination is called colposcopy.

If your type of VIN is thought to be associated with the HPV virus, it is important that you attend regularly for your cervical smear test when it is due.

Treating VIN

The main aim of treating VIN is to relieve symptoms such as pain, itching or burning. Treatment may also reduce the risk of developing cancer at a later date.

The treatment of VIN often depends on:

- how large the affected area is
- whether you have any symptoms
- the estimated risk of the area developing into cancer.

If you have a small area of low grade VIN or you have no symptoms, treatment may not be recommended. But your doctors may suggest that you have the area checked regularly for any changes.

Surgical treatment

Surgery to remove the affected area is the most common treatment for VIN. This operation is called a wide local excision, or a more extensive operation called a vulvectomy. Surgery is performed under a general anaesthetic. Sometimes the vulval tissue can be replaced with skin taken from another part of the body (a skin graft).

Your doctor will discuss all details of your treatment with you before the operation.

Medical treatment

Your doctor may recommend a course of treatment using a cream to be applied directly to the affected area. Cream treatments can be used on their own, or following surgery. The most commonly used cream is called Imiquinod. This treatment stimulates your own immune system to fight HPV infection and allow the skin to return to normal. The main side effect of this treatment is soreness and inflammation of the affected area. Some women also have flu like symptoms. These symptoms clear when the drug is stopped.

Not smoking

Smoking stops your body's immune system from working properly. Stopping smoking means that your body is more likely to fight the HPV infection and can reduce the risk of developing further abnormal cells in the vulva, cervix and vagina.

You can receive free help to stop smoking at One Life Suffolk and with your GP.

How else can I treat my symptoms?

Your specialist will advise you on how to reduce any itching or pain. The information leaflet 'Care of the Vulva' has some helpful general advice. Avoid using soap and use **Hydromol or Dermal 500** for washing and as a soothing moisturiser. **Lidocaine 5% ointment** can be used to soothe pain, although it may sting when first applied. Symptoms do usually improve after treatment for VIN.

Will VIN affect my sex life?

You may feel worried about having sex if you have been diagnosed with VIN. If you have concerns about VIN causing sexual difficulties, it is important to remember that you can discuss these with your specialist.

After treatment for VIN

There is a risk that VIN can come back after treatment, so you will see your specialist regularly, often for many years. Your doctors will check for signs of any further changes that may need to be treated.

If there is only a small chance of your VIN returning, your specialist may discharge you into the care of your GP.

If you notice any new symptoms or changes, it is important to let your GP know so you can be referred back to your hospital specialist.

Further information

If you have any further queries regarding VIN and would like to speak to a nurse please telephone 01284 713601, an answer phone is available.

<https://www.wsh.nhs.uk/CMS-Documents/Patient-leaflets/Gynaecology/6553-1-Imiquimod-Aldara-for-the-treatment-of-vulval-intraepithelial-neoplasia-VIN.pdf>

<https://www.wsh.nhs.uk/CMS-Documents/Patient-leaflets/Gynaecology/6051-1-Vulva-Care-of-Vulval-Skin.pdf>

For further information on smoking cessation please contact One Life Suffolk
<https://onelifesuffolk.co.uk/services/stop-smoking/>

This leaflet is based on information produced by Macmillan. There is further information on VIN available on their website: www.macmillan.org.uk

*If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)
<https://www.accessable.co.uk>*

