

Vulvar Pain

You have been diagnosed with a **vulvar pain** syndrome. Vulvar pain is broken down into two subgroups: provoked pain and generalized pain. Women with provoked pain have pain only on touch. The pain may be caused by intercourse, tampon use, sitting, walking, etc. Women with generalized pain have pain that occurs all of the time or most of the time and occurs without touch or provocation. This provoked pain is termed **vestibulodynia** or **vestibulitis** and unprovoked pain is termed **vulvodynia**. The terminology continues to change as researchers and providers learn more about the conditions. Women may also have a combination of vulvodynia and vestibulitis. Sometimes, the muscles of the pelvic floor are involved as a response to the pain and the term **vaginismus** is used.

Before we diagnosed you with vulvar pain, we did a number of tests including vaginal cultures, a careful vulvar and vaginal examination and perhaps a vulvar biopsy. In the majority of cases, all of these tests are negative in patients with vulvar pain. Vulvar pain refers to the sensation of pain in the vulva that used to be felt as touch or pleasure. For a variety of reasons, the nerves in your vulva have become over stimulated and respond by sending a message to your brain that you are experiencing pain. Researchers do not know the exact cause of vulvar pain but tissues studies have shown that there is increased inflammation in the vulvar tissue of patients with vestibulitis. Some vulvar pain may be caused by trauma, some by repeated infections or overuse of topical medications, but in most cases, we don't know what causes vulvar pain. Studies have shown that 13-15% of women have experienced vulvar pain at some point in their life.

There are a number of options for treating vulvar pain. The goal of treatment is to stop the over stimulation of the nerves in the vulva. There are a variety of medication classes that break the communication between your vulva and your brain so you don't feel the pain. These include tricyclic antidepressants, anti seizure medications, and topical anesthetics. There are both oral options and topical (cream) options. We also often prescribe physical therapy and biofeedback for vulvar pain. In any area of the body, if you experience chronic pain, you tend to tighten or clench your muscles in that area. In the case of vulvar pain, this results in an increased resting tone of the pelvic floor muscles which can further increase your pain and sometimes lead to vaginismus. A physical therapist can teach you to voluntarily relax your muscles and decrease pain. Some of our patients have found acupuncture to be helpful as well.

Treatment of vulvar pain is tailored to the individual woman. We take multiple things into consideration when choosing a treatment option for you including: your medical history, other medications you take, and your lifestyle. We may not find a treatment plan that works for you on the first try and often, treatments are used in combination. We will follow you closely for several weeks or months until we find an option that works for you.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions (617-732-4806) about your diagnosis or your treatment(s) and be sure to keep your follow up appointments.