

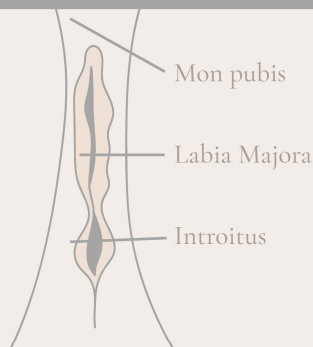
We all know that we should check our breasts monthly. Well, did you know we should be checking our vulva monthly too?

Why? There are a variety of vulval skin conditions that can often get overlooked or mistaken for thrush or a urinary tract infection. Therefore, it is important to examine yourself to know your baseline and be aware of any changes. There are a variety of vulval and vaginal skin conditions such as: genitourinary syndrome of menopause (or vulvovaginal atrophy), lichen sclerosus, lichen planus, lichen simplex, vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN), candida infection, psoriasis and vulval cancer.

Many women avoid talking to their health care professional about vulval issues because they are embarrassed. We need to normalise vulval and vaginal issues, so people do not feel embarrassed and can access the right care. This how to guide can help you on the right track.

The vulva is the external genitalia of a women, see diagram below.

The diagram right shows you the vulva in more detail. You need to be able to identify the different areas in the vulva, to enable the Dr to make a diagnosis. For example, if you say you have an itchy vagina, you may get a diagnosis of thrush, when you meant your vulva, when in fact it could be one of the skin issues listed. If you go and see your Dr to talk about your vagina or vulva, take a diagram with you so you can point to the area before being examined. You will also find it useful to take a mirror with you, so when the Dr refers to a certain part, you can see. This is particularly useful when being advised how to apply certain topical ointments.

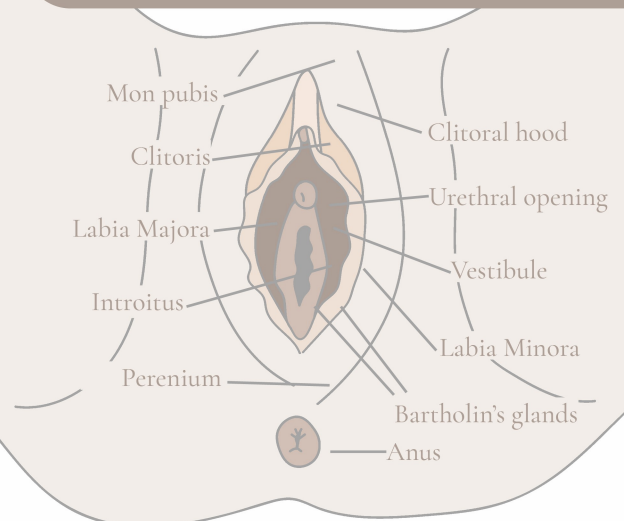


Physical signs you may have vulval/vaginal skin issues:

- Itching
- Burning
- Painful intercourse
- Post coital bleeding
- Bleeding from the vagina or vulva (non-period related)
- Burning when passing urine
- Becoming aware of your vagina when walking, sitting
- Painful sitting
- Urinary tract infection symptoms
- Getting up to wee during the night

To check your vulva, grab a mirror and make yourself comfortable.

- Site the mirror so you can see the reflection of your vulva.
- With a clean hand, gently prise open your labia major,
- You will now see the other areas that make up your vulva.
- Gently & carefully look around the labia major, labia minor, gently moving the vulval skin to see the clitoral hood, clitoris, urethral opening, and vestibule.
- While checking, pay attention to your perineum and anal area.



Visual signs to look out for:

- Red patches
- Purple patches
- Raised white patches
- Splits
- Lump or wart like growth
- A mole that changes colour or shape
- Tears
- Blister
- ulcers
- Sores
- Crinkled, creased shiny looking skin
- Thinning and/or fusing of the labia major & labia minor
- Shrinking of the clitoris