PATIENT INFORMATION

Know your own vulva

What is your vulva?

Your vulva is all your external female genital area. This means you're: mons pubis, labia majora, labia minora, clitoris, urethra, vaginal opening, and two sets of glands known as the Bartholin's and Skene's glands.

- Mons pubis – This is the area in front of your pubic bone and is predominantly covered in pubic hair
- Labia majora – These are a pair of skin folds predominantly covered in pubic hair which are below the mons pubis, are sometimes known as the external lips
- Labia minora – These are a secondary pair of skin folds which sit more internally to the labia majora, sometimes these internal lips can extend past the labia majora which is completely normal. They start up by the clitoris and extend back towards the back of the vaginal opening
- Clitoris – only a small portion of the clitoris is seen externally, the rest sits under the superficial layer of the pelvic floor muscle. The clitoris and clitoral hood sit at the anterior portion of your vulva
- Urethra – this is where your urine is expelled from and is located between the clitoris and the vaginal opening. This can sometimes be tucked away or a little harder to visualise on some females which is completely normal
- Vaginal opening – This is located at the posterior aspect of your vulva and is the entrance to the vaginal tube which then leads to the cervix. This is where you bleed from during your menstrual cycle, where vaginal sexual intercourse occurs and where a baby is born during a vaginal delivery
- Bartholin glands – (these are not always visible) these are a set of two, located on the left and right side of the vaginal opening, within the labia minora. They produce a mucus likes substance which helps to moisturise the vulva and reduce friction during sexual intercourse
- Skene glands – (these are not always visible) these are a set of two, located on the left and right of the urethra. They produce an antibacterial substance which helps to prevent urinary tract infections.

Why should you check your vulva?

Doing a self-examination regularly means that you can notice any changes in tissue quality and appearance. Checks like this can help you to pick up any vulva conditions or early signs of vulva cancer.

Everyone's vulva is unique– the shape, size, texture and scent, which is why it is so important that you know what's normal for you. This way, any changes—no matter how small—are easier to detect.

When should you check your vulva?

We would advise checking your vulva once a month, have a set date when you do your vulvar and breast checks.

How to check your vulva?

1. Wash your hands
2. Sit comfortably in a well-lit room or with a torch and a hand mirror
3. Place the mirror between your legs
4. Start on the outside (your mons pubis and labia majora) look and feel for any pain, soreness, lumps, rashes or changes to your skin
5. Then open only the labia majora to look and feel for any pain, soreness, lumps, rashes or changes to your skin
6. Then open the labia minora and repeat this process again (look and feel for any pain, soreness, lumps, rashes or changes to your skin)
7. If you notice any changes regarding pain, lumps, rashes or the quality of the skin and then get in contact with your GP

What are you looking for?

- Anything which isn't normal to you
- A persistent itch
- Pain or soreness
- Any changes to your vulval skin, such as thickened, raised, red, lighter or darker patches
- A new mole or a mole which is changing shape or colour
- An open sore or growth
- A lump or swelling
- A rash

What to do when you notice something?

Make an appointment to see your GP to discuss what you have found.

Labia library

Please note that this will show you real life female genitals from the front and below.

- https://www.labialibrary.org.au/labia_gallery/

Breast check page

How to carry out a breast check.

- https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/how-to-check-your-breasts-or-chest

References:

- Anatomy, Abdomen and Pelvis: Female External Genitalia - StatPearls - NCBI Bookshelf (nih.gov)
- Screening for vulval cancer | Cancer Research UK
- Tips for checking your vulva | The Eve Appeal
- How to check your breasts or chest - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
- Labia Gallery | Labia Library by Women's Health Victoria

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.