



Vulvar & Vaginal Hygiene

What is the vulva?

Vulva is a word you may not have heard before. Most people have heard and used the word vagina. The vulva is the external (outside) part of the genitalia of someone with a vagina. The vagina is the internal (inside) part.

The vulva has several parts: the lips (the labia majora on the outside and the labia minora, the thinner lips on the inside), the clitoris, and the skin over the clitoris which is called the clitoral hood.

During puberty, the lips of the vulva grow bigger. It is normal for the inner lips to be larger than the outer lips. Pubic hair grows on the labia majora and on the mons (the area above the vulva). Pubic hair can also grow on the thighs.

What is the vagina?

The vagina is the inner part of the genitalia. It connects the uterus to the outside of your body. After puberty, the vagina makes discharge, a liquid that you may notice on your underwear. The liquid may be clear, white, or yellow. Vaginal discharge is how the vagina keeps itself healthy! Sometimes teens are worried that their discharge is abnormal. If the discharge doesn't smell bad and doesn't itch, it is probably normal. You can always ask your healthcare provider if you aren't sure.

How do I keep my vulva and vagina clean?

With so many products available, it can be hard to know what you should or shouldn't use for personal hygiene.

- When it comes to genital hygiene, the simpler the better!
- Use unscented, mild soap to wash your vulva
- Rinse the soap off with plain water; be sure to rinse between the folds of the lips so that soap residue doesn't stay trapped
- Don't put any soap inside your vagina
- Douching is *not* recommended (douching means rinsing out the vagina with vinegar and water or other fragranced products, usually purchased at the drugstore)
- Wear cotton underwear that isn't too tight
- Change out of wet swim suits as soon as possible and take a shower after swimming
- Avoid lotions with fragrance or perfumes on your vulva
- If you use tampons, make sure to remove and replace them frequently (every 4-6 hours) to avoid infection
- Don't use products for "vaginal freshness" or itching without talking to your healthcare provider first
- Use pads and tampons that are fragrance/scent free. Some people can be allergic to these additives

Should I remove my pubic hair?

Shaving pubic hair is a personal preference. Some people like to shave their "bikini line" so that pubic hair isn't visible while wearing some styles of bathing suits. Some people like to remove all of their pubic hair. However, pubic hair is normal and doesn't need to be removed in order to be clean.

Leaving pubic hair may help protect the labia from rubbing on your clothing. Shaving, waxing, using hair removal cream and laser removal of pubic hair can cause small cuts in the skin or irritate the hair follicles. This can cause painful or itchy bumps to form on the skin. If your skin is prone to keloid scars, you can get these scars on your vulva. While it may seem like a good idea, you may want to consider whether it is worth your time, expense and keep in mind the downsides of hair removal.