

# Vulvoscopy

## Women's Health

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### **Why have I been referred to the vulvoscopy clinic?**

Your GP will have referred you if you have noticed itching, redness, swelling or changes in colour of the vulva. It may be necessary to take one or two samples of vulval tissue (vulval biopsy) to determine the cause. The vulva is the area of skin forming the outside, visible part of the female genitalia. It consists of two outer lips (labia majora) and the inner lips (labia minora), which are thin and delicate.

### **What is a vulvoscopy?**

A vulvoscopy involves examining the skin with a special magnifying instrument with a light attached. It looks a bit like a large pair of binoculars on a stand and lets the specialist look more closely at the vulval skin. It does not touch you or go inside you.

### **What does the procedure involve?**

You will be asked to remove your lower garments and underwear. A nurse will be in attendance to offer you support and reassurance. You will be seated on a special type of examination couch with padded supports on which to rest your legs. The specialist may dab a solution onto the vulval skin with cotton wool to highlight any abnormal areas. This sometimes causes a mild irritation or stinging sensation which soon passes. The specialist may wish to take a small sample of skin (a biopsy) at this time, but will discuss each stage of the procedure with you and allow you to ask questions.

### **What is a vulval biopsy?**

A vulval biopsy is a small sample of skin which is taken from the vulva and then sent to the laboratory to be examined. A local anaesthetic will be applied before the biopsy is taken. This will sting for a few moments, after which you will not feel any further discomfort during the procedure. You may have one or two dissolvable stitches.

### **What happens after the biopsy?**

You are advised to go home and rest for the remainder of the day, and the following day. If you work it is advisable to take two to three days off.

You can expect some discomfort such as soreness and/or light bleeding.

It is important to keep the vulval area clean and dry. You may take a bath or shower daily but it is advised **not** to use any bubble bath or scented products.

The stitches will dissolve after approximately 10-14 days and you may resume sexual intercourse when you feel comfortable to do so.

### **What pain relief can I take?**

When the local anaesthetic wears off you may wish to take your usual over-the-counter pain relief, such as ibuprofen or paracetamol. It is advisable to avoid aspirin as this can cause the wound to bleed due to its blood thinning properties.

## Are there any risks?

- **Common risks**

It is quite usual to experience a little light bleeding from the area for one or two days after the biopsy.

- **Occasional risks**

Infection can occasionally occur and cause the pain to worsen. If this happens, it is advisable to seek advice from your GP who can prescribe antibiotics if required.

## What are the benefits of a biopsy?

It enables our specialist to find out what is causing your problems and to plan any further treatment if required.

## When will I receive the results?

You will be informed of the results in writing within four weeks of the procedure. If you need any further treatment, this will be explained in the letter.

## Contact us

If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact the clinic between the hours of 8am-5pm, Monday to Friday.

Leatherhead Hospital  
Tel. 01372 384340

St Helier Hospital  
Tel. 020 8296 2954 and select the option Colposcopy

## In case of emergency

If you are particularly worried about worsening pain or bleeding and are unable to reach us do not hesitate to contact your own GP, or in case of an emergency go straight to A&E.

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