INTRODUCTION:

Your doctor has recently diagnosed you with vulvitis. Vulvitis is an inflammation of the vulva. Vulvitis is generally caused by a chronic process that irritates the skin near the vagina. The vulva is defined as the area outside the vagina between the legs and includes:

DEFINITIONS:

1. The mons pubis: Fatty pads that are covered with pubic hair.
2. The labia: Commonly referred to as the “lips of the vagina”.
3. The labia majora: Hair covered fatty mounds outside the labia minora.
4. The creases where the legs are attached to a woman’s body.
5. The vagina starts at the labia majora and extends through to the cervix, which is the mouth of the womb. The vagina is also the birth canal.

CAUSES OF VULVITIS

Vulvitis is generally caused by chemical irritation or a breakdown in the skin of the vulva. Several potential causes of vulvitis include:

1. Yeast infections.
2. Bacterial infections.
3. Maceration caused by constant rubbing or scratching of the vulva, which then leads to a breakdown in the skin and irritation.

One of the most common symptoms of vulvitis is intense itching. Chronic vulvitis is a condition that is difficult to treat and requires ongoing therapy over several months to several years.

TREATMENT

Vulvitis is best treated with local vulvar hygiene. The following are local measures that are important to do to control vulvitis:

1. Women should wear cotton underwear.
2. Women should wash the cotton underwear in Dreft or Ivory Snow detergent.
3. Women who have a severe form of vulvitis should wash their clothes in Dreft or Ivory Snow for the first two to three months.
4. It is advisable to take short, cool showers to avoid drying out the skin.
5. Dove unscented soap is also recommended to avoid drying out the skin around the vulva.
6. It is important to wash only the hairy areas of the outside of the vagina. Do not wash inside the vagina or part the labia (lips of the vagina), and wash at the entrance of the vagina.

7. Women should not douche, except under the advice of the physician. Women should not use feminine deodorant sprays, especially women who have vulvitis.

8. Women should not shave the pubic hair, which is a common initial irritant to the skin, causing vulvitis.

9. It is advisable not to use any powders on or around the vulva. The only exception would be unscented corn starch in small amounts.

**TYPES OF CLOTHES**

It is advisable to wear loose fitting clothing or dresses. If you are able to, when you are around the house, wearing a dress with no underwear will decrease the moisture around the vulva.

**TREATMENTS THAT YOUR DOCTOR MAY RECOMMEND**

1. Aveeno sitz baths, twice a day can soothe women who have intense itching.
2. It is recommended that all women after showering or sitz bath, thoroughly dry the vulva and the pubic region with a dry towel. Do not rub. Pat gently.
3. Dry the vulva thoroughly with a blow dryer on a cool setting. If you do not have a hair dryer with a cool setting, lay down on your bed with your knees bent and your legs drawn up. Separate your legs in the frog position and allow the vulva to completely dry approximately 15 minutes. This is recommended to be done twice a day for the first two to three months, after which, it can be done on an as needed basis to control vulvitis.

**MEDICATIONS THAT MAY BE PRESCRIBED**

1. Lidex is an anti-inflammatory steroid medication. This is very helpful in treating vulvitis.
2. Valisone or Synalar are steroid medications that will reduce the inflammation and itching that is associated with vulvitis.
3. Vistaril, Atarax, and Benadryl are antihistamines that are also used to treat the itching that is associated with vulvitis.

**GENERAL MEASURES**

Because women who are overweight tend to have thighs that rub against each other and also retain moisture in the area on the vulva, it is recommended to lose weight. Other general measures include:

Attempting to identify any chemical or irritant that you may be unknowingly exposing your body to is hard to do. Some commonly overlooked irritants include:

1. Scented toilet paper
2. Deodorant pads or other sanitary napkins that may have fibers bleached with formaldehyde to whiten the pad.
3. Urine is also a common cause for chronic vulvitis. If a woman has urine incontinence, unable to control the flow of her urine, this is a potential irritant to the skin of the vulva.