

What is the **treatment?**

For many women, securing a diagnosis will provide a great sense of relief. Since many healthcare providers believe this is a chronic pain condition, most of the treatment options target the nervous system. Some success in treating generalized vulvodynia comes from a group of medications that work on these nerves to influence their messages. A wide variety of antidepressants, anticonvulsants, and muscle relaxants can help. These medicines are called “neuromodulators” or “chronic pain medicines”. Examples of these medicines include the oral tricyclic medications, such as amitriptyline, nortriptyline, imipramine, and desipramine. When these medicines are used to treat generalized vulvodynia, they reduce the hypersensitivity of the nerve endings. Other medicines used for this pain condition include gabapentin, pregabalin, and duloxetine. Recent research has also looked at these medicines made into creams that can be applied directly to the vulva. Some women with generalized vulvodynia have had success with the application compounded creams. Some patients

respond well to nerve blocks for their very sensitive nerves: a local anesthetic is injected into the offending nerve area to block / stop the pain and relieve discomfort. This is often provided in a specialized pain clinic.

Physical therapy is also used at times. It is important to find a provider familiar with vulvodynia.

There is also evidence that women with vulvar pain often suffer from sexual problems. This can include low desire (poor libido), difficult arousal (poor natural lubrication or wetness), and lack of orgasm. Many couples feel troubled by their sexual problems. Engaging in sexual counseling has been shown to not only help couples with intimacy, but often reduces pain.

For patients with pain only at the entranceway that have failed other treatments, surgery is performed at times (vestibulectomy). The area of the entranceway with pain is removed in the operating room under anesthesia, and the vagina or other skin nearby is used to cover it.

Things to **remember:**

- 1) In spite of not fully understanding the condition called Generalized Vulvodynia, most women with vulvar pain improve with treatment.
- 2) Improvement often takes time, sometimes months.
- 3) Pain can wax and wane, often reflecting the poorly understood nature of this condition. This does not mean that a previously effective treatment is no longer working.
- 4) Chronic pain can be exhausting and demoralizing.
- 5) Couple or sexual counseling can be extremely helpful.