

Your Vulvar Surgery

Your Gynecologic Oncology Surgeon has scheduled you for vulvar surgery. This handout will *give* you information about your vulvar surgery. It is important that you and your family member/partner-in-care read this handout. You will also need to read the booklet called 'The Surgical Passport' that you were given.

Why you need to have vulvar surgery

You may need to have vulvar surgery because you have a benign, precancerous or cancerous area on your vulva. Benign means that it is not cancer.

You may also need to have some of your pelvic lymph nodes removed. You and your surgeon will discuss what type of vulvar surgery is best for you. Any tissue that is removed during your surgery will be tested by a pathologist. A pathologist is a doctor who examines body tissues and fluids for changes caused by disease.

Different types of vulvar surgery

Vulvectomy / Wide Local Excision

The pre-cancerous or cancerous area is cut out of your vulva and the skin is stitched back together.

Lymphadenectomy (or lymph node dissection)

Lymph nodes in your groin area are removed. This is done to remove lymph nodes that have cancer and other lymph nodes when there is a high chance that the cancer may spread there.

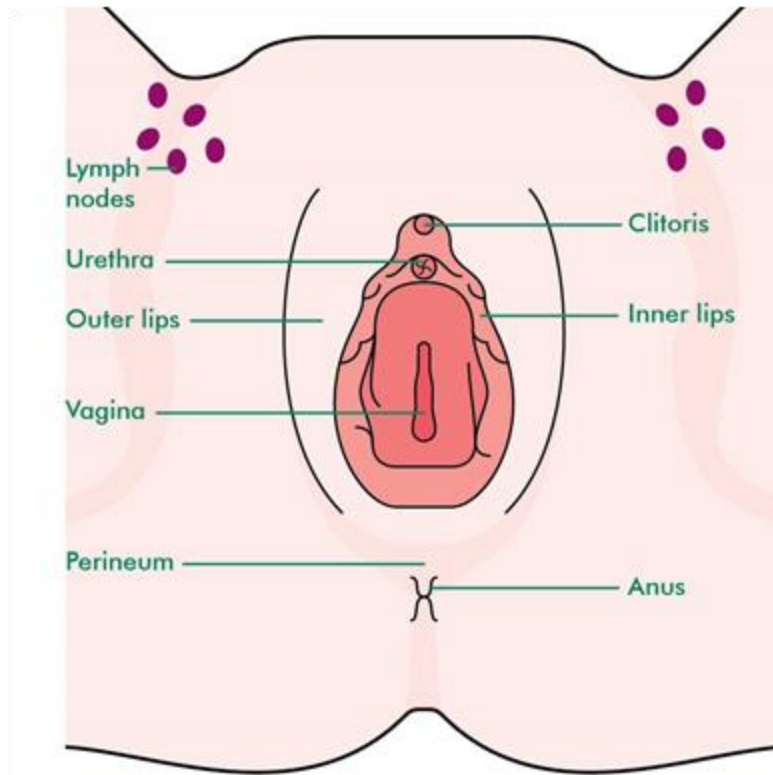
Your surgeon may remove only a few lymph nodes with a sentinel node procedure. If this is the plan you will have a special dye injected on the day of surgery to help the surgeon see the lymph nodes.

LASER

High energy light waves are used to burn the precancerous disease away.

You and your surgeon will discuss what type of vulvar surgery is best for you.

A picture of your vulva



If your tumour is cancer

Only surgery may be needed to treat your cancer. You may also be offered radiation and/or systemic therapy treatments. Deciding what is the right choice for you can depend on:

- The cell type of your cancer
- The stage of your cancer
- Your age and overall health
- Your feelings about the treatment

Your healthcare team will give you the information and support needed to make the right choice for you.

Your healthcare team

This is a list of the healthcare team members you may see while you are in hospital.

Gynecologic Oncology Surgeon

Your surgeon will tell you what type of surgery you need to have. Your surgeon will work with your healthcare team to guide your care before, during and after your surgery.

Nurse Navigator / Nurse Practitioner

Your nurse navigator and nurse practitioner will support you and help plan your care with your surgeon and healthcare team.

Nurse

Nurses will care for you before and after your surgery. They will give you the support, medications and information you need while in hospital.

Social Worker

Social workers are trained in counselling and can help you solve problems, make decisions and improve your feelings of wellbeing. A social worker can give support and information to help you and your family member with your worries or concerns. Ask a member of your healthcare team about a referral to a social worker.

Dietitian

Dietitians specialize in nutrition counselling and education. A dietitian is available to talk to you about what to eat and drink to help you recover from your surgery. Ask a member of your healthcare team about a referral to a dietitian.

Home and Community Care Coordinator

A care coordinator from the Central East Local Health Integration Network (CE LHIN): Home and Community Care Program will help plan your discharge from hospital and make sure you have the supports you need for your care at home.

What you can expect after your vulvar surgery

Bring a maxi pad with you to the hospital on the day of your surgery. You will need a maxi pad to protect your underwear. You may go home the same day of your surgery or you may need to stay in hospital for 2 to 4 days. This will depend on the type of vulvar surgery you have. Each person recovers differently. How you recover from your surgery can depend on your age and overall health. You may have a hard time with your emotions or feelings about having vulvar surgery. This can impact how you recover from surgery. Talking to a social worker about this can be helpful. Ask a member of your healthcare team about a referral to a social worker.

A nurse will give you the information you need to care for yourself after surgery. You will be given a follow up appointment to see your surgeon in 2 to 4 weeks.

After you go home

Instructions for all patients

- Your surgeon will give you a prescription for pain medication.
- You will slowly be able to return to your regular diet. This may take up to 3 weeks. Drink 6-8 cups (1 cup = 250ml) of water every day. Eat foods that include bran, whole grains, fruits and vegetables to help prevent constipation.
- You may need to go home with a urinary catheter. Your surgeon will talk to you about this if needed.

The nurse will check the box for the instructions you need to follow based on the surgery you are having.

Vulvectomy / Wide Local Excision

- Change your maxi pad or dressing if it becomes soaked with yellow/pink drainage. Call your surgeon if your maxi pad or dressing is soaked with blood.
- Remove your dressing the day after your surgery.
- Do not wear tight underwear or tight fitting clothes. You can use a maxi pad to protect your underwear. Change the maxi pad at least once a day.
- You have stitches. Your surgeon will tell you if they need to be removed or if they will dissolve on their own.
- Have a sitz bath 2 to 3 times a day. You will be given instructions after your surgery on how to do this.
- After you urinate or have a bowel movement, rinse the area with a water squirt bottle. Pat the area dry. Keep the incision as dry as possible.
- If your surgeon prescribed Flamazine cream for you, apply it to your incision 2 times a day as directed.
- Ask your surgeon how long you need to be off work after your surgery.
- Everyone heals differently. You will slowly be able to do more activities as you feel better.
 - No lifting more than 15 lbs (6.8 kg) for 3 weeks.
 - No driving for 3 weeks.
 - No strenuous exercise (example: vacuuming, lawn mowing, golfing, swimming, weight lifting) for 3 to 6 weeks.
 - No sex or anything in your vagina for 4 to 6 weeks.

Lymphadenectomy (or lymph node dissection)

- If you have a small drain(s) in your groin area, a visiting nurse will come to your home to help you manage it.
- Wash your groin area with water and mild soap. It is important to keep it clean and dry.

LASER

- If you have a dressing, remove it the day after your surgery.
- Do not wear tight underwear or tight fitting clothes. You can use a maxi pad to protect your underwear.
- If your surgeon prescribed Flamazine cream for you, apply it to your laser treated area 2 times a day as directed.
- Ask your surgeon how long you need to be off work after your surgery. This is normally 1 to 3 days.
- You will slowly be able to do more activities as you feel better.

For questions or concerns

Call the nurse navigator at your surgeon's office if you have any of the symptoms below. After hours or on weekends/holidays, go to a walk-in clinic or the emergency department at the hospital closest to you.

- Increasing amount of bleeding from your vagina
- Increasing amount of pain in your abdomen (belly)
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- No bowel movement or passing of gas for more than 24 hours
- A fever above 38.3° C/100.9°F at any time or above 38.0° C/100.4°F for more than an hour.
- Extreme shaking and chills
- Redness or swelling of your incision
- A bad smelling discharge from your incision

You can talk to the nurse navigator by calling your surgeon's office (Monday to Friday from 8:00am to 4:00pm – except on holidays).

Dr. Francis at 905-576-8711 extension 32917

Dr. Igwe at 905-576-8711 extension 32917

Your follow up appointment

- You will be given a follow up appointment to see your surgeon in 2 to 4 weeks (this may be different if you had a LASER procedure). If you are not given this appointment before you leave the hospital, call the receptionist at your surgeon's office within 1 week after you go home.
- At this appointment, your surgeon will talk to you about your pathology results.
- You will go to the Durham Regional Cancer Centre (DRCC) or Colposcopy Clinic for this appointment.
- Bring your DRCC ID card and your Ontario Health Card (OHIP) with you to this appointment.

Please talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have questions or don't understand any of the information in this handout.

For more information, go to the Cancer Care pages on the Lakeridge Health website at www.lakeridgehealth.on.ca. Click on Our Services > Diagnosis > Gynecologic Oncology DAP.

Last revised: June 2019