



Health professionals
committed to the
reproductive needs of
children and adolescents

Caring for your child with Labial Adhesions

What are labial adhesions?

Labial adhesions happen when the small inner lips, called the labia minora, of a girl's genitals stick together in the center instead of being apart.

Image girl without
labial adhesions

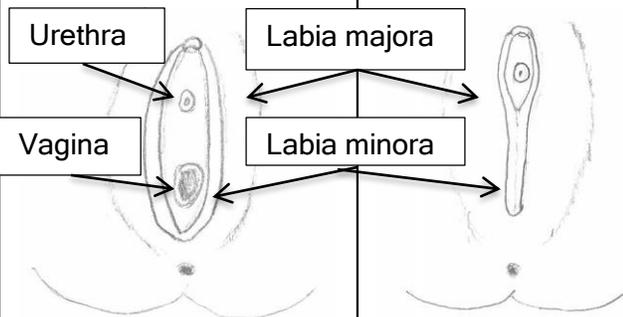


Image of girl with labial
adhesions

In this drawing the
opening to the vagina
is hidden by adhesions

What causes labial adhesions?

Labial adhesions often start when girls are very young, even as babies or toddlers. Girls have no estrogen before puberty and the labia minora are more sensitive at this time. When the labia minor are irritated from soaps, infection, or even an allergy, they can stick together. Some girls have very sensitive skin and are more likely to have this happen. Although most girls who have labial adhesions are **not** victims of sex abuse, girls who have had injury to the labia minora can get adhesions so it will be normal for your doctor to ask about abuse.

How does your doctor diagnose labial adhesions?

Usually your doctor can tell by looking at a girl while she is sitting with her legs apart. If your child is scared, sometimes the doctor may have her sit on your lap or on her hands and knees. Sometimes your doctor may need to separate the outer lips (labia majora) to see the inner lips. This should not hurt but can be scary to some girls.

What are the symptoms of labial adhesions?

Some girls have no symptoms and it is just something her parent or doctor notices. This happens if the adhesions are small. If the adhesions cover much of the opening to the vagina, the urine can get trapped behind the adhesions after a girl urinates (pees). This can cause leaking of urine into her underwear when she stands up and can cause more irritation since the area stays wet. Some girls can get a urinary tract infection.

How are labial adhesions treated?

If there are no symptoms or if the adhesions are small, no treatment is needed. The adhesions will get better as she enters puberty and her body makes estrogen which makes the labia minora less sensitive and less likely to stick together after puberty.

If a girl has symptoms like leaking urine or infections, the doctor will give her estrogen cream or a steroid cream and teach you how to apply it to help the adhesions separate over a few weeks. Some girls can learn to do this themselves. Surgery is rarely needed and when it is, the doctor will make sure the separation is as painless as possible for your daughter.

After they are treated, will the adhesions come back?

Once girls have been treated for labial adhesions, usually keeping irritants away will keep the adhesions from coming back. Using oily creams such as diaper rash ointment keeps irritants away from the sensitive skin. Girls should not take bubble baths or bathe in soapy water since the soaps can cause irritation. Usually the adhesions do not come back after puberty starts since the estrogen that causes breast development also causes the skin of the labia to become less sensitive.

Will labial adhesions or their treatment cause problems later in life?

Some families worry that touching a girl's genitals during treatment will affect a girl's sexually. This is definitely not the case! Also the labial adhesions are very superficial and do not affect a girl's internal organs such as her vagina or her uterus. She will be able to have a normal reproductive life when she grows up.