



Labial Fusion

Information for patients

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What is labial fusion?

Labial fusion (or adhesions) is a condition in which the lips of the vaginal opening become stuck together down the middle, leaving a smaller opening (or no visible opening). It is a common condition affecting girls under the age of 7 years.

What causes labial fusion?

The labia are normally separate at birth and for a couple of months after birth because the mother's oestrogen (female hormone) passes through the placenta to the baby. After 3-6 months, the oestrogen levels become very low, and the labia can stick together, possibly due to irritation of the skin (from nappy rash, poor hygiene or products such as soaps or bubble bath).

What are the symptoms?

In most cases there are no symptoms, and the vagina is noticed to look different by a parent, relative or health care professional. This can be alarming as it may look as if the vagina is absent.

Occasionally, urine can get trapped behind the fused lips and cause difficulty with toilet training, as small amounts of urine can trickle out after the child gets off the toilet. The urine may also spray due to the fusion. Sometimes the fusion can lead to water infections.

What treatment is available?

Fused labia do not usually cause any problems and separate on their own as the girl gets older and starts to produce her own oestrogen. Hence in most cases, treatment is not necessary.

If symptoms occur, your doctor may prescribe a hormone cream (containing oestrogen). This should be applied sparingly on the line where the labia are fused (apply a pea-sized amount and trace over the line of fusion with a cotton bud or fingertip). The cream should be applied twice daily and may take a few weeks to open the labia. They may close again when the cream is stopped. Sometimes the cream can cause a small amount of breast development. This will disappear once the cream is stopped.

In very rare cases, the labia may need to be separated under a general anaesthetic.

Other things parents can do to help:

Zinc oxide (Sudocrem) or petroleum jelly (Vaseline) can be applied to keep the skin moist (e.g. after the bath).

Avoid strong soaps, perfumes or bubble bath. These can irritate the skin around the vagina.

Do not try to force open the labia. This will be painful and may distress your child. It can damage the skin and may cause the child to be scared if she needs to be examined again.

What can be done to prevent fusion from happening again?

To decrease the risk of fusion happening again after separation, barrier creams (Sudocrem or Vaseline) can be used to keep the labia moist.

Once the child approaches puberty, the labia will separate and fusion will not come back.