CONDITION

Genital injury

A genital injury is damage to the external sex organs or nearby urinary structures caused by trauma.

WHAT IT IS
Damage to external genitals or nearby urinary structures

BODY SYSTEM
Reproductive and urinary systems

MAIN SYMPTOMS
Pain, swelling, bruising, bleeding

WHAT CAUSES IT
Blunt impact, cuts, penetration, burns, or constriction

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED
Examination, urine tests, ultrasound, or other imaging

MAIN TREATMENT
First aid, wound care, pain relief, sometimes surgery

CAN IT BE CURED?
Sometimes - many injuries heal fully with treatment

IS IT AN EMERGENCY?
Sometimes - heavy bleeding, severe swelling, or sudden testicular pain

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK
Minor injuries usually heal; severe damage may have lasting effects

Overview

A genital injury is damage to the penis, scrotum, testicles, vulva, clitoris, vagina, or nearby urinary structures. It may result from a fall, sport, accident, sexual activity, assault, burn, cut, bite, or a tight object around the genitals.

Because genital tissue has a rich blood supply, even a small injury can cause noticeable bleeding, bruising, or swelling. Superficial bruises and small skin wounds often heal with simple care, but some injuries can affect blood flow, urination, sexual function, or fertility.

Urgent conditions include testicular rupture, penile fracture, rapidly increasing swelling, and urethral injury. Sudden severe testicular pain is an emergency even after trauma because testicular torsion-a twisting that cuts off blood supply-may occur at the same time.

Symptoms

Symptoms depend on the injured area and may include:

A collection of blood under the skin is called a hematoma . Scrotal or vulvar hematomas can become large because these tissues stretch easily. Large or expanding swelling needs prompt assessment.

Internal damage may be present without an open wound, especially after a forceful impact, straddle injury, penetrating injury, or pelvic fracture.

- Pain or tenderness
- Bruising, swelling, or a firm lump
- Bleeding from the skin, vagina, or urinary opening
- A cut, graze, puncture, burn, or torn tissue
- Pain or difficulty when passing urine
- Blood in the urine
- A change in the shape or position of a testicle
- Penile bending, rapid swelling, or loss of an erection after a cracking sensation
- Numbness, pale skin, or darkened skin beyond a tight ring or trapped object

Causes and risk factors

Blunt trauma may happen during contact sports, cycling, a fall onto a hard edge, a road crash, or a direct kick. A straddle injury occurs when the genital area strikes an object between the legs.

Sexual activity can cause tears, bruising, or penile injury. A penile fracture is a tear in the tough tissue around the erection chambers, usually after forceful bending of an erect penis. It may cause a pop or crack, immediate loss of the erection, pain, and rapid swelling.

Other causes include:

Blood-thinning medicines and clotting disorders can increase bleeding. Previous genital surgery or altered anatomy may affect assessment. An injury caused by violence or abuse is never the injured person's fault.

- Cuts, punctures, bites, and gunshot injuries
- Objects inserted into the vagina or urinary opening

- Rings or objects that compress genital tissue
- Chemical, electrical, heat, or cold injuries
- Pelvic fractures involving the bladder or urethra
- Surgical or medical procedures
- Sexual assault, abuse, or genital cutting

Diagnosis

A healthcare professional will ask what happened and whether there is severe pain, bleeding, loss of sensation, or difficulty urinating. You can ask for an explanation before each part of the examination and may be able to request a chaperone or support person.

The examination checks the skin, swelling, circulation, sensation, and position of genital structures. An internal vaginal examination is not always required, but may be suggested for a possible deep tear, ongoing bleeding, or internal foreign object.

Tests may include:

Blood at the urinary opening, inability to pass urine, or a pelvic fracture may indicate urethral injury. A urinary catheter may be delayed until this has been assessed.

After sexual assault, a specialist service can offer medical care, testing, preventive treatment, and an optional forensic examination. Healthcare does not require agreement to every part of evidence collection. Consent and reporting rules vary by location and for children.

- A urine test for blood
- Blood tests if bleeding is significant or surgery may be needed
- Ultrasound to assess a testicle, blood flow, or hematoma
- Imaging of the pelvis or urinary tract after major trauma
- A special urethral X-ray if urethral damage is suspected
- Pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection testing when relevant and agreed to

Treatment and management

Treatment depends on the injured area, wound depth, blood flow, bleeding, and whether urination is affected.

For a minor closed injury, rest, supportive underwear, and a cold pack wrapped in cloth may

help. Do not apply ice directly to the skin. Use gentle pressure with clean cloth or gauze for a small bleeding wound. Do not put creams, disinfectants, or objects inside a wound unless advised.

Do not remove an embedded object or force off a tight ring if this could worsen the injury. Emergency clinicians can remove trapped objects safely.

Medical treatment may include wound cleaning, pain relief, stitches, or draining a large hematoma. Tetanus protection and antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline may be needed for bites, contaminated wounds, or certain open injuries.

Surgery may be required for:

If the urethra is injured, urine may temporarily drain through a catheter placed through the urinary opening or lower abdomen.

After sexual assault, time-sensitive options may include emergency contraception and medicines to reduce the risk of certain infections. Care should reflect your circumstances, preferences, and local services.

- A torn testicle or severe scrotal injury
- A penile fracture
- Deep vaginal or vulvar tears
- Damaged blood vessels or poor tissue blood flow
- Urethral injury
- Penetrating wounds or uncontrolled bleeding

Complications

Deeper or untreated injuries can lead to:

Large hematomas can compress tissue or conceal deeper damage. Poor blood supply caused by constriction, swelling, or twisted tissue can cause permanent injury unless relieved quickly.

Emotional support after a frightening injury or assault may include trauma-informed counselling, advocacy, and practical safety help.

- Infection or an abscess
- Persistent pain or tenderness
- Scarring or changes in appearance

- Urethral narrowing and difficulty urinating
- Erectile or ejaculation problems
- Pain during sexual activity
- Loss or shrinkage of testicular tissue
- Reduced fertility after severe reproductive-organ injury
- Emotional distress, anxiety, or trauma-related symptoms

Prevention

Not every genital injury can be prevented, and responsibility for assault always lies with the person who caused it.

Risk-reduction steps include:

Protective equipment cannot prevent every injury. Significant pain or swelling still needs assessment.

- Wear correctly fitted protection for contact sports or hazardous work
- Follow safety guidance for cycling, machinery, and vehicle restraints
- Stop sexual activity if there is sharp pain or forceful bending
- Use sexual devices as intended and avoid objects that may break
- Remove constricting rings or bands if swelling or numbness develops
- Store chemicals safely and promptly rinse exposed skin
- Get help if a trapped object cannot be removed easily

Living with it and what to expect

Minor bruises, grazes, and cuts often improve over several days, although swelling may take longer. Scrotal and vulvar bruising can look extensive because blood spreads through loose tissue.

Follow instructions about wound care, bathing, physical activity, and sexual activity. Avoid activities that increase pain or pull on a healing wound. Return to sport or sex gradually, based on comfort and the type of injury.

Follow-up after a repair may assess healing, urination, testicular blood flow, erections, or pain. It is particularly important after urethral, testicular, penile, or deep vaginal injury because

narrowing or scar-related symptoms can appear later.

Minor external injuries do not usually affect fertility or long-term sexual function. Severe injuries can have lasting effects, but early treatment may preserve tissue and function. If one testicle is badly damaged, the other may still produce hormones and sperm.

Persistent fear, sleep problems, distress, or unwanted memories also deserve professional support.

When to get medical help

Call emergency services or go to an emergency department now for:

Arrange same-day assessment for persistent pain, marked bruising, a deep cut, blood in the urine, painful urination, or swelling that is not settling. Children should be assessed promptly when an injury is significant, the history is unclear, or abuse is a concern.

For a minor injury that is improving, routine follow-up may be enough. Seek advice if pain or swelling worsens, the wound opens, pus or fever develops, urination changes, or improvement stops.

After sexual assault, you can seek urgent medical and emotional support even without visible injuries. If you are in immediate danger, contact emergency services or move to a safer place if possible.

- Heavy bleeding or bleeding that does not stop with gentle pressure
- Sudden, severe testicular pain, with or without obvious injury
- A displaced, unusually high, or misshapen testicle
- A penile crack or pop followed by rapid swelling or loss of erection
- Inability to pass urine or blood at the urinary opening
- Rapidly increasing genital swelling
- An open wound with exposed deeper tissue
- A penetrating injury, serious bite, or major burn
- A trapped object causing pain, numbness, pale skin, or darkening
- Faintness, confusion, weakness, or other signs of major blood loss

Common questions

Can a genital injury affect fertility?

A superficial skin injury usually does not affect fertility. Risk is greater with severe damage to both testicles, internal reproductive organs, or structures that carry sperm. Examination, ultrasound, or later fertility testing provides more information than bruising alone.

How long does genital bruising take to heal?

Minor bruising usually improves over days to a few weeks. Larger hematomas and surgical injuries may take longer. Increasing swelling, worsening pain, fever, or difficulty urinating needs assessment.

What should I do immediately after a genital injury?

Move to safety, stop the activity, and apply gentle pressure to external bleeding with clean material. Use a wrapped cold pack for a minor closed injury. Do not apply ice directly, force off a trapped object, remove an embedded object, or insert anything into the wound.

Does severe bruising always mean serious damage?

No. Genital tissue can bruise dramatically after a minor impact, but appearance cannot rule out deeper damage. Severe pain, rapid swelling, abnormal testicle position, blood in the urine, or trouble urinating needs prompt assessment.

Will I need surgery?

Many minor injuries do not require surgery. It is more likely for uncontrolled bleeding, poor blood flow, a torn testicle, penile fracture, deep laceration, urethral injury, or penetrating trauma.

Can I get care after sexual assault without reporting it?

In many places, medical care is available even if you are unsure about making a police report. Options may include injury treatment, infection testing, preventive medicines, emergency contraception, advocacy, and an optional forensic examination. Local rules differ, especially for children and vulnerable adults.

Sources

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