

Patient information: Teen sexuality (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is sexuality? — Your sexuality involves your body, how you think about yourself, and how you feel about other people. It depends on:

- Your sex organs – Boys' sex organs are the penis and testicles. Girls' sex organs are the breasts, uterus, vagina, and ovaries ([figure 1](#) and [figure 2](#) and [figure 3](#)).
- Whether you feel like a girl or a boy, or somewhere in between
- Which sex you find most attractive – Heterosexual means being attracted to people of the opposite sex. Homosexual means being attracted to people of the same sex. Bisexual means being attracted to both sexes.

What is sexual development? — Sexual development is another term for the changes in your body that happen as you grow up. These changes can start in the pre-teen years and continue until adulthood. Some changes happen in the body. For example:

- In girls, the breasts grow bigger.
- In boys, hair grows on the face.
- In girls and boys, hair grows under the arms and in the genital area.

Other changes involve the way you think and feel, and the way you feel about other people. As you develop, you will probably start to feel attracted to certain people and want to be close with them.

What is sex? — When people talk about sex, they are usually talking about vaginal intercourse. Vaginal intercourse is when a man puts his penis into a woman's vagina. But there are other types of sex acts, too. These include:

- Touching another person's body or genitals
- Using the mouth or tongue on another person's genitals – This is called oral sex.
- Putting the penis or another object into another person's anus – This is called anal sex.
- Touching your own genitals with your hand or another object – This is called masturbation.

Before doing any of these, it's important to make sure that the person you are with agrees to what you are doing (if you are with another person).

When is sex NOT OK? — Sex is **not** OK if it is with someone who does not want to do it or is not sure about doing it. When a person forces sex on someone who does not want it, it is called rape. Rape is a serious crime that can lead to being arrested or put in jail.

It is also not OK for an adult to have sex with a teen. If an adult makes you do any type of sex act, tell a parent, doctor, or other adult whom you trust.

Some states have laws about teens and sex. In some states, it is against the law for teens under a certain age to have sex, even if they both want to.

What is a sexually transmitted infection? — A sexually transmitted infection, or STI, is an infection that you can catch during sex. Some STIs include:

- HIV – HIV is a lifelong condition that affects the body's infection-fighting system. The last stage of HIV is

called AIDS.

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) – HPV doesn't usually cause symptoms at first, but it can lead to cervical cancer in women, and genital warts in men and women.
- Chlamydia and gonorrhea – These don't always cause symptoms at first. But they can lead to long-term problems in women, such as severe pain and trouble getting pregnant.
- Herpes – This can cause blisters and open sores in the genital area.
- Trichomonas, or "trich" – This can cause genital itching and discharge.
- Hepatitis B – This can lead to long-term liver problems.

In many cases, you can get an STI and not know it. That's because STIs often do not have any noticeable signs or symptoms. Even when they cause no symptoms, STIs can lead to serious problems. For example, STIs can lead to problems getting pregnant or increase the risk of certain kinds of cancer.

How can I protect myself from getting an STI? — The only way to be sure you won't get an STI is by not having sex. If you do have sex, you can lower your chance of getting an STI by using a condom every time you have sex.

People who use condoms can still get STIs, though. That's because condoms do not cover all of the skin that comes in contact with another person. Some infections can spread just from skin to skin contact. Plus, condoms can break or slip off. To help prevent this, be sure that the penis is completely hard before putting a condom on. Also, make sure that there is no air in the tip of the condom. Hold the tip closed as you roll the condom down over the penis. After ejaculation, the penis should be pulled out of the vagina or anus while it is still a little hard. When pulling out, hold the condom around the base of the penis to keep it from slipping off.

There are vaccines for 2 STIs — HPV and hepatitis B. Vaccines are treatments (usually shots) that can prevent certain infections.

How can I prevent pregnancy? — The only way to be sure you won't get pregnant is by not having intercourse. If you do have intercourse, you can lower your chance of getting pregnant by using birth control. There are different types of birth control that work in different ways. Some are sold over-the-counter. Others need a prescription.

Should I see a doctor or nurse? — All teens should have regular check-ups, but check-ups are especially important after you start having sex. Your doctor or nurse will talk with you about STIs and pregnancy, and how to prevent them. He or she can also answer any questions that you have.

More on this topic

[Patient information: Adolescent sexuality \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

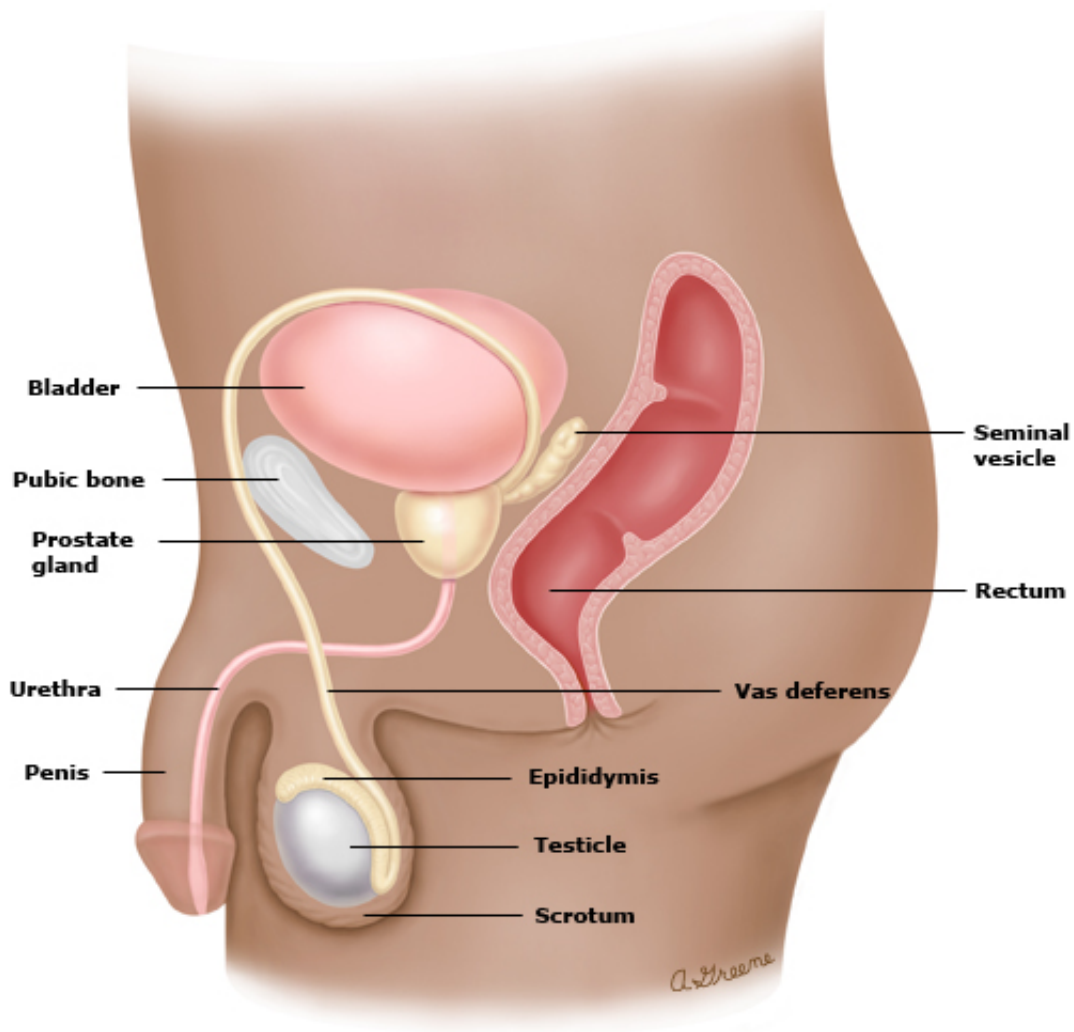
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GRAPHICS

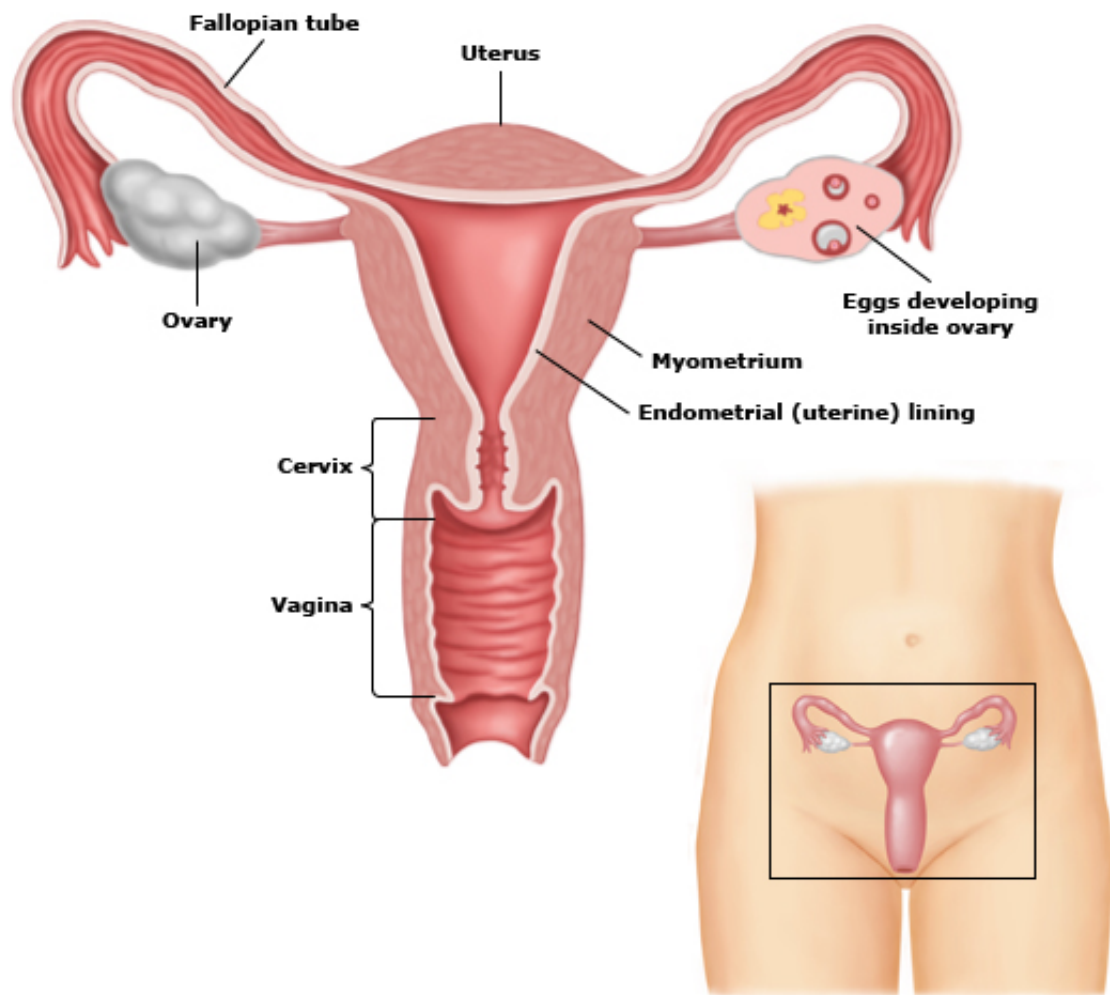
Male reproductive anatomy



This drawing shows what a man's reproductive organs look like.

Graphic 68075 Version 6.0

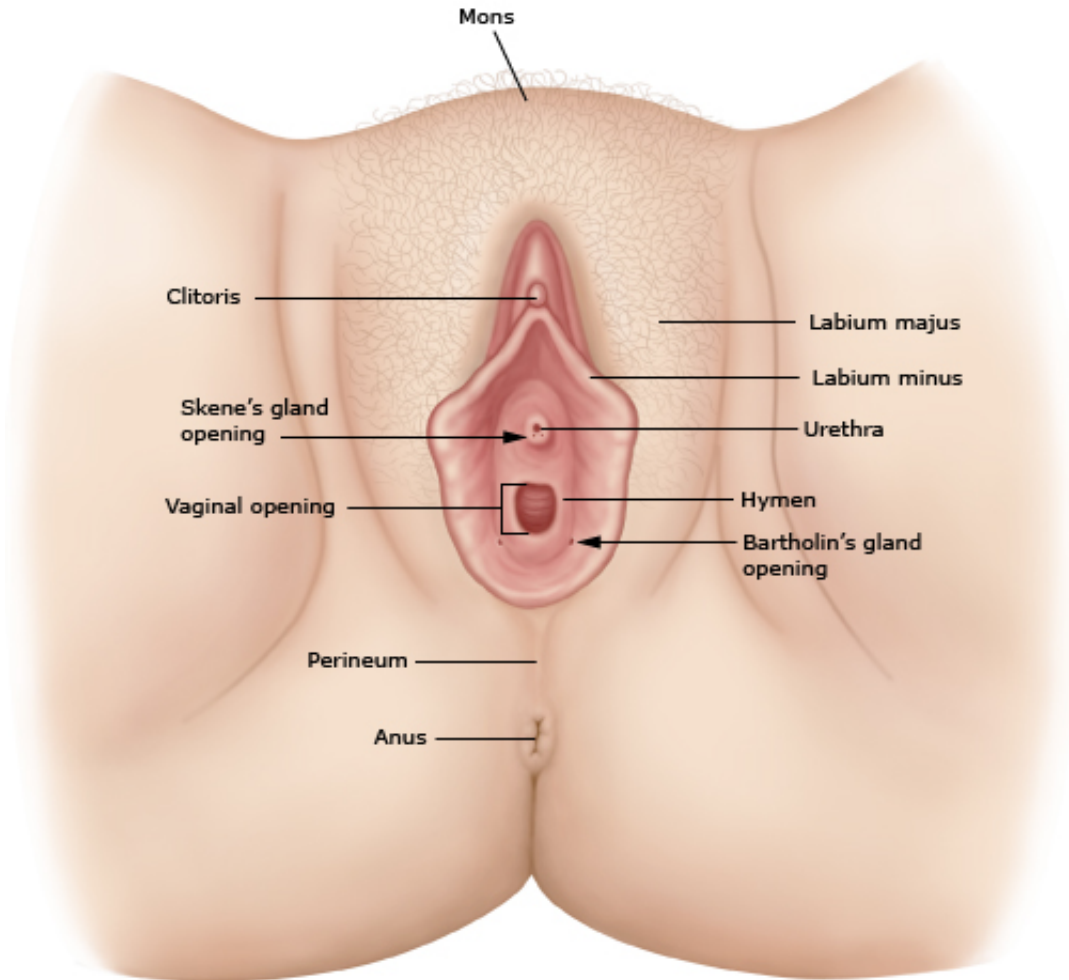
Female reproductive anatomy



These are the internal organs that make up a woman's reproductive system.

Graphic 80271 Version 5.0

Adult female external genitalia



This drawing shows the parts of a woman's genitals.

Graphic 53704 Version 7.0