

A guide to the female body



4GIRLS



Sexual development can start around the age of nine to 13 with pubic and underarm hair and breasts starting to grow.



Girls develop at different rates. Some girls may have their first period when they're eight years old, others may be 18. All these changes – known as **puberty** – take place over several years.

My period's late. What should I do?

I think I fancy girls

I've got a vaginal discharge. Have I caught something?

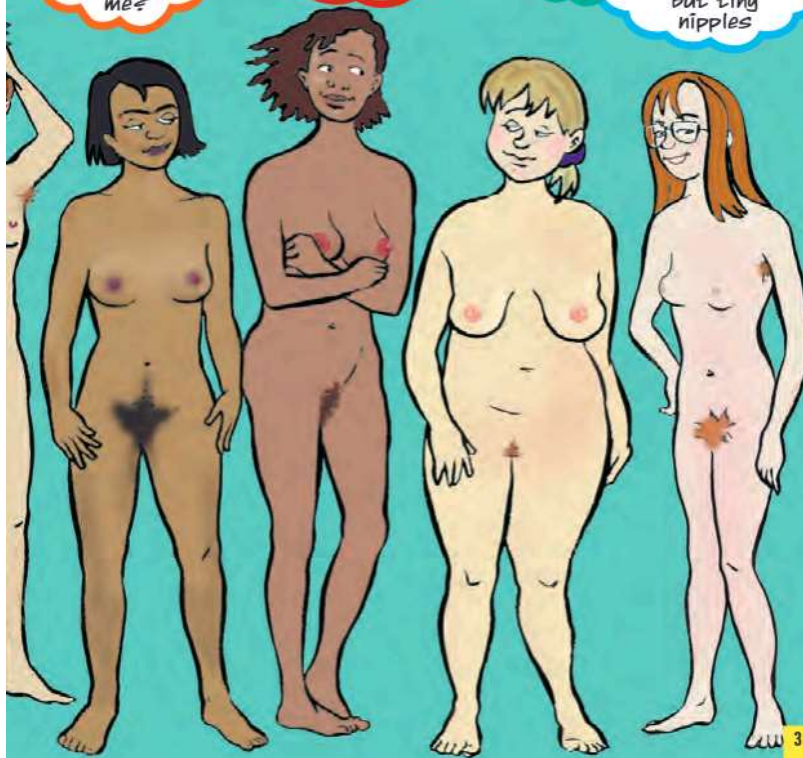
Can my doctor tell my parents I'm having sex?

I don't want to have sex. Is something wrong with me?

My thighs are huge. Should I go on a diet?

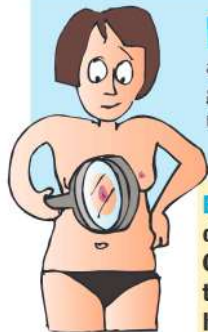
My periods are really painful

I've got C-cup breasts but tiny nipples





FACTS ABOUT BREASTS



BREASTS get a lot of attention in our society and many girls worry that theirs don't measure up to the images around them.



Breasts and nipples tingle or itch while they're developing, but this will stop once they've grown. Growth can be uneven so one breast may be bigger than the other. This will even out but many women have slightly different-sized breasts all their lives.

Breasts come in different shapes and sizes and can be soft or firm –



– small



– or large.



Nipples may point up –



– or droop downwards



– be dark



– or pale.



These differences are all normal.

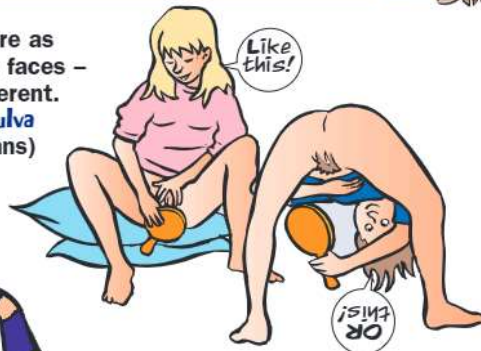
Usually the nipples point outwards, but some girls have nipples that are inverted (point inwards). This is normal and there is no need to worry. In some women, the nipples remain like this throughout their life. It does not mean there is anything wrong with the breasts, and inverted nipples won't stop you breastfeeding if you have a baby.

It's really worth going to a shop that offers a free measuring service so you get a bra that's right for you.

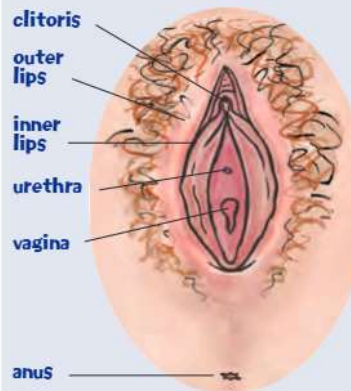
FACTS ABOUT GENITALS



GENITALS are as individual as people's faces – they all look very different. Take a look at your **vulva** (external genital organs) with a mirror ...



VULVA



The **outer lips** (labia majora) cover the clitoris and extend back to just in front of the anus.

The outer lips are thicker and often hairy on the outside and are mottled and darker on the inside.

When a woman is sexually aroused they open up to reveal the entrance to the **vagina**.

The **inner lips** (labia minora) join at the front in a small fleshy bump called the **clitoris** – its purpose is to give sexual pleasure.

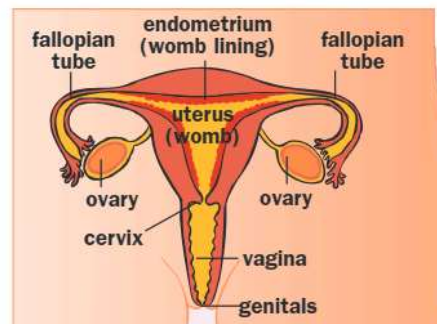
The inner lips are thinner. They vary in colour from light pink to dark brown. One outer lip may be bigger than the other or the inner lips may hang below the outer lips.

You may have heard about cervical screening tests. This is a test offered to all women aged 20–25 and above, depending on where you live in the UK, every 3–5 years.

A cervical screening test spots the warning signs before cervical cancer develops. It can be uncomfortable, but it doesn't hurt and it only takes a couple of minutes.



WHAT IS A MENSTRUAL CYCLE?



The **MENSTRUAL CYCLE** is from the first day of a period until the day before the next period starts.

The average length of the menstrual cycle varies although it can be as short as 21 days or as long as 40 days – both are normal.

The menstrual cycle is controlled by **hormones**. The hormone estrogen causes about 20 tiny eggs to grow in one of your ovaries each month.

When a woman reaches puberty she will have one to two million eggs in her ovaries.

The release of the egg is called **OVULATION** and it happens around 10–16 days before the start of the next period.

Estrogen also causes the mucus in the cervix to become thinner, wetter and more stretchy, allowing sperm to reach an egg more easily.

Hormones make the eggs grow and also thicken the lining of your uterus. Usually one egg becomes larger than the others and goes into the fallopian tube that connects the ovary to the uterus.



If the egg is not fertilised, it is re-absorbed into your body.

Hormone levels drop and the uterus lining breaks up and is released through the vagina as a **period**.

FACTS ABOUT PERIODS



When you first have periods the time between one period and the next may vary so it can be difficult to know when you will have your next one.

When your menstrual cycle becomes more regular you can use a diary or an app to work out when you're due.



It's for you to decide whether you prefer to use towels or tampons or a mooncup. This is a silicone cup that is worn internally to collect menstrual fluid and can be emptied and re-used. One method isn't better than the others.



Your vagina is naturally self-cleansing so you don't need to use perfumed pads or special sprays (and these can cause irritation).



Will I still be a virgin if I use a tampon? Yes. You are a virgin until you have sex.

Does putting in a tampon for the first time hurt? No, not if you relax. It can be difficult to put in a tampon if you're tense and not sure how to put it in. When you have your period try putting a tampon in when you have lots of time and privacy. Read the instructions that come with tampons to find out how to put them in. If the tampon feels uncomfortable it may not be in far enough.

Sometimes girls and women can have problems with tampons, leading to a serious illness called toxic shock syndrome (TSS).

If you have two or more of the following while using tampons: being sick; a rash; sore throat; sudden fever; diarrhoea, stop using tampons and see your doctor right away.



LIVING WITH PERIODS

Changes in hormone levels can affect your **moods**. You may feel:



energetic and sexy around the time you ovulate

or moody, tearful or angry the week before your period is due.



Breasts may become **sore** or a **bit larger** and you may get **spots** on your face just before your period. Eating lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, having a diet low in sugar and salt and taking regular exercise can help.



Periods may sometimes be **painful**. Some women are particularly badly affected.

"At first my periods were fine but now the day I get my period is just awful. I have really bad pains, feel sick and sometimes have diarrhoea. My GP said I should go on the pill but my mum's not keen and says I'm neurotic."

Andrea, 15

The pain is due to contractions of the uterus muscle. It's a very real pain, so Andrea isn't being neurotic.



What you can do about pain

Hold a hot water bottle against your stomach and take a painkiller. The contraceptive combined pill or patch are very good for painful periods, but if you don't want to use these your doctor will be able to prescribe something else. Exercise, such as walking or sport, can help too.



So if you get really bad PERIOD PAINS don't suffer in silence.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PERIODS



There are lots of silly stories about periods and what you can do when you have one.



It's up to you what you do when you have a period, and you will have a lot of periods in your life.

It can take some time to get used to having periods and feeling confident about dealing with them. But periods are a normal, healthy, special part of being female.

I've heard that if you have sex during a period then you won't get pregnant.

Not true. It's also **not true** that you won't get pregnant. If it's the first time you've had sex/you have sex standing up/don't have an orgasm/bath afterwards.

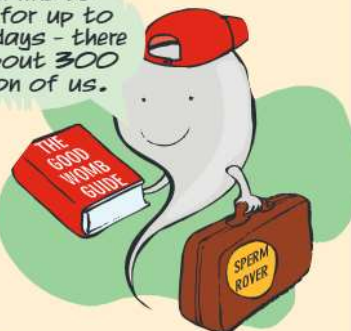


You are **most** likely to get pregnant around ovulation, but you may not know when this happens.

Also, sperm can live in your body for up to seven days so pregnancy is possible at virtually any time in your cycle.

Boys produce around 300 million sperm when they ejaculate and it takes only **one** to make you pregnant.

We'd like to stay for up to seven days - there are about 300 million of us.



So don't have sex unless you feel ready, and you've got contraception sorted (see pages 12 & 13).



WHAT IS DISCHARGE?

It's normal to have some **DISCHARGE** from your vagina as this natural lubricant keeps your vagina healthy.

This discharge is usually clear or slightly milky and may be faintly yellow when it dries on your pants.



When you're sexually excited your vagina produces a natural lubricant to make having sex easier.

The amount of discharge increases around ovulation to help sperm swim up your vagina to meet an egg.

If you have an unusual discharge that itches and/or smells see a doctor as you may have an infection. This could be a very common infection called **THRUSH**, which can develop if you wear tight clothes, use perfumed soap or bubble bath or if you are just feeling run down. If you've had sex you may have got a sexually transmitted infection. Whatever the cause it can usually be easily treated.



ENGAGED



If you think you have cystitis see a doctor.

CYSTITIS Many women at some point in their lives have cystitis, which is an inflammation of the bladder or urethra. You feel you want to go the toilet all the time even when your bladder is empty.

It can be caused by bruising during sex or heavy petting, or from bacteria from your anus being transferred to your urethra. This is why you should always wipe yourself from front to back.

And make sure you drink lots of water every day.



FACTS ABOUT MASTURBATION



Masturbation (wanking) is something women might not talk about, but most people do it.

Most women rub around or on their clitoris and maybe move fingers in and out of the vagina.

If you masturbate to orgasm the muscles in your vagina will move in spasms and feelings of pleasure will flow through your whole body.

Many women **FANTASISE** while they masturbate.

IS IT
BAD FOR
YOU?

No. Women who have learnt what they like can pass this knowledge on to a partner.

Turn left-
that's great!

MMMM - in a
few seconds we'd
better do an
**EMERGENCY
STOP**

AM I GAY?



Having a 'crush' on someone of the same sex is very common and doesn't necessarily mean you're gay.

You may be sexually interested in other women – or in women and men.

Your body is yours to share with whoever you choose.

You may choose to share it with no-one.



GOING FURTHER...



It is against the law to have sex with a young person under the age of 16.

This is known as the age of consent and is the same for everyone, whatever your gender or sexual orientation.

My boyfriend says I'm frigid because I don't want to have sex.

Frigid is an insulting word used when girls say 'no'. If he's interested in you he'll be prepared to listen to how you feel and wait if necessary. If he isn't, he's just putting pressure on you.

Sex should be enjoyable, so:



- **Don't have sex until you're absolutely sure it's what you want.**
- **Ditch boys who try to pressure you or insult you.**

- **Realise that all women can enjoy sex with the right partner at the right time.**
- **If you are sure you want to have sex, get contraception sorted first.**

You can get **FREE** information and help about **CONTRACEPTION** from a doctor, nurse, sexual health clinic, some genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, a young people's service or contraception clinic.

Let the staff know if you would prefer to be seen by a woman doctor or nurse.



ADVICE ABOUT CONTRACEPTION



You can be any age to get advice. All services are **CONFIDENTIAL** – this means they won't tell anyone you've been.

However, they may need to involve other services if they believe you, or another person, to be at significant risk of harm (such as physical or sexual abuse). They will discuss this with you.

Where to go for ADVICE on contraception

There should be a clinic near you that runs sessions for young people. FPA (see back cover) has details of all clinics in the UK.



Emergency >>>

Women can get **emergency contraception** from their doctor or a contraception or sexual health clinic and pharmacies.

There are three types of emergency contraception you can use.

The **pill Levonelle** must be taken up to three days (72 hours) after sex.

The **pill ellaOne** must be taken up to five days (120 hours) after sex.

Both pills are more effective the earlier they are taken.

An **emergency IUD (intrauterine device)** can be fitted into the woman's uterus within five days of sex or ovulation (release of an egg).

There are many contraception methods to choose from.

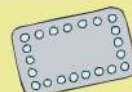
For most you won't need a vaginal examination. Say if you have a problem, such as unusual vaginal discharge or bleeding after sex.



male and female condoms



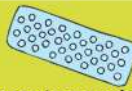
implant



combined pill



contraceptive vaginal ring



progestogen-only pill



patch



diaphragm or cap with spermicide



IUS



contraceptive injection



IUD

Do I Look OK?



How you feel about yourself is much more important than what you look like or how much you weigh.

With all the body changes that take place around puberty, it's easy to become obsessed with **HOW YOU LOOK.**

You do a lot of growing during your teens so the amount of body fat and muscle you have will increase – your body needs it. As your body changes from a girl's to a woman's you'll get taller, your hips, thighs and buttocks will get broader.



All women have **BODY HAIR** though some remove it.

Pubic hair around the genitals appears first, then hair grows in the armpits, on the legs and sometimes on other parts of the body.

Some women choose to shave, wax or use cream or epilators to remove some body hair, and others don't.

Some people find body hair very sexy – it's a matter of choice.

If you are tall or have a large frame then you will **WEIGH** more than if you are short or have a small frame.

Remember that you may also weigh more just before and during your period.



Most women see their body as bigger than it actually is.

Most women who diet aren't overweight – they're just not happy with their bodies.

FACTS ABOUT WEIGHT



Many women have an unhappy and guilty relationship with food – denying themselves things they like, which they then crave, and counting every calorie.

It's okay to eat chips, cakes, chocolate and crisps – if you eat them occasionally and eat other foods as well that balance your diet. If you need to snack between meals go for fruit, nuts or cheese.

Many girls who want to lose weight just cut down what they eat.

If you are overweight you are taking in more energy than you use up, so you need to exercise.

EXERCISE can also firm up or slim parts of your body.



Extreme worry about your weight can cause health problems. If you think your concern about what you eat is taking over your life then seek help.



Leave yourself time to eat **breakfast**. You need the energy to take you through the day.

Miracle diets don't work as the weight just goes back on when you stop the diet.

You need to eat a **healthy balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables**. This 'diet' is what you eat every day for the rest of your life.

If you eat healthily and make exercise a part of your life you can forget about dieting.



WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

For information on sexual health, sex and relationships visit www.fpa.org.uk or check out these FPA booklets.



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This organisation has been certified as a producer of reliable health and social care information.
www.theinformationstandard.org

Certified member

These organisations can also give you confidential information and advice.

BROOK

www.brook.org.uk

For sexual health services and advice for young people.

CHILDLINE

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

24-hour helpline for young people with any problem.

BEAT

www.b-eat.co.uk

Support for people affected by eating disorders.

FRANK

www.talktofrank.com

For information on drugs.

RAPE CRISIS

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

For girls and women who have been raped or assaulted recently or in the past.

SWITCHBOARD

– the LGBT+ helpline

switchboard.lgbt

Support and information for gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and trans people.

THE MIX

www.getconnected.org.uk

0808 808 4994

Free, confidential helpline and advice service for young people.

YOUTH ACCESS

www.youthaccess.org.uk

For your nearest counselling service.